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THE
DEAD IN CHRIST.

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THE DEAD IN CHRIST.

THEIR STATE:

PRESENT AND FUTURE.

WITH

REFLECTIONS ON THE DEATH OF A VERY DEAR
CHRISTIAN FRIEND.

BY JOHN BROWN, D.D.

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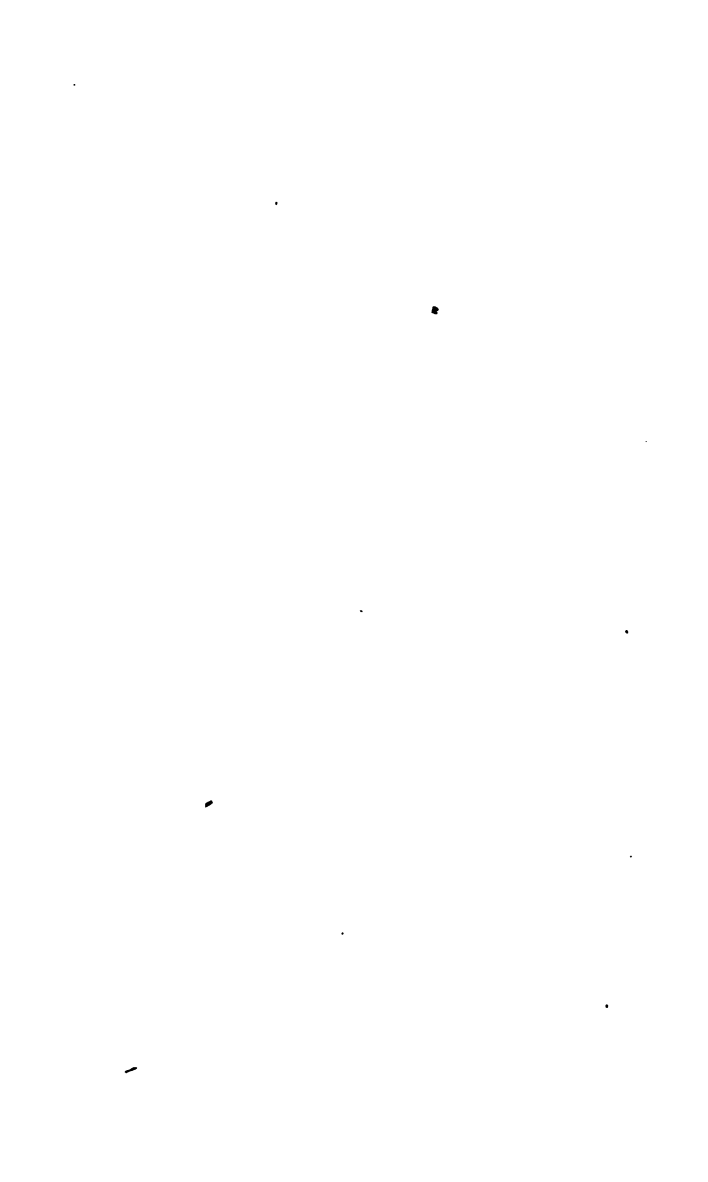
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**'I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them
which are asleep.'—'Comfort one another with
these words.'—PAUL.**



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THE
DEAD IN CHRIST.



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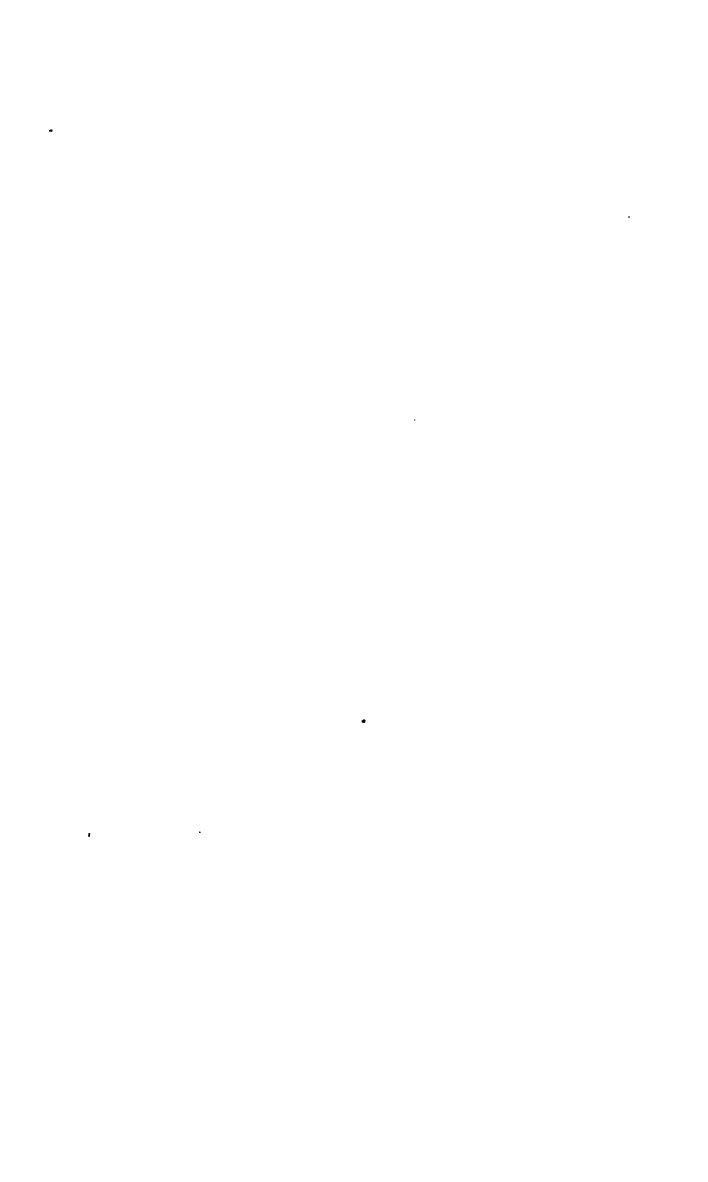
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“THE DEAD IN CHRIST.”

THEIR STATE: PRESENT AND FUTURE.



INTRODUCTION.

WHEN our friends leave us for a foreign country, to take up their residence there, our thoughts and our affections naturally follow them; and the questions often suggest themselves to our minds, Where are they? and how are they engaged? What are their circumstances? what are their employments? what are their prospects? This current of thought and feeling acquires additional depth, and fulness, and force, if it be certain, or even probable, that we shall, sooner or later, follow them to the distant land to which they have migrated.

Were it not for the influence of scepticism, and infidelity, and conscious guilt, such a tendency of thought and feeling towards the unseen and eternal world would be universal and powerful among mankind—so powerful as most materially to moderate the ardour of earthly attachments, and the eagerness of earthly pursuits; for all have many friends who have crossed the mysterious gulf between time and eternity; and all are on its brink, and must follow—none knows how soon—none knows how suddenly. But the principles referred to effectually counterwork, in the minds of the great body of mankind, the natural feelings of curiosity, affection, and enlightened self-interest, and lead them to endeavour to forget, as soon and as completely as possible, their departed friends and the world into which they have entered.

In the Christian mind alone has the natural current of thought and feeling free

course. The Christian's strongest attachments are those which rise out of his spiritual character and relations. He sees, in rapid succession, friend after friend depart—"depart to be with Christ," and he trusts that, ere long, he shall go also. This draws away his mind and heart from earth to heaven, and strengthens the habit of "looking not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things unseen and eternal." He is aware that nothing certain can be known respecting the state of being on which his Christian friends have entered, and into which he is soon to pass, but from divine revelation. Those portions of the holy scriptures, therefore, which refer to this subject are, with him, favourite subjects of study. "Into those things he desires to look."

This tendency, which is habitual in the renewed mind, receives a new impulse on every new occurrence of the departure of a

Christian friend. An increasing unwillingness is felt to remain ignorant of anything that can be known respecting "them who are asleep," and the mind is gladly yielded up to the contemplation of that which is at once fitted to soothe the pangs of separation, to strengthen the hope of reunion, and make us ready to pass like our friends, "through death into life." To meet this tendency is the object of the following remarks—in which an attempt shall be made to present in the fewest plainest words, all that inspired Scripture reveals respecting the state, present and future, of "the dead in Christ."

PART I. OF THE PRESENT STATE OF
"THE DEAD IN CHRIST."

§ 1. *State of the bodies of "the dead in Christ."*

The bodies of the saints of God, like those of other men, are no sooner deprived of life

than they discover a tendency towards disorganisation and resolution into their original elements; and, consigned to the bosom of the earth, in darkness and silence, the curiously-constructed material frame, so “fearfully and wonderfully made,” becomes, in succession, a mass of putrefaction, a ghastly skeleton, a collection of unconnected and decaying bones, and dust, undistinguishable but by the eye of Omniscience from the dust which surrounds it.

We have no reason to think that there is any such thing as annihilation in the universe. The constituent elements of the body of those who have died have not ceased to exist; but they have entered, or are entering, into new combinations—combinations, in their turn, destined to dissolution—to make way to other combinations, so that, in comparatively a short term of years, the bodies of the saints, like those of other men, are, to human perception, as if

they had never been. This is the whole history of the bodies of the saints till the resurrection—they “waste away; and where are they?”

§ 2. *Proof of a separate state of conscious being.*

But “they who have fallen asleep in Christ are not perished.” “There is a spirit in man;” and by far the most interesting question concerning “them who are asleep” is, what has become of this spirit? Does it continue to exist? or, when the body has been deprived of life, has it been deprived of being? and if it continue to exist, does it exist in a state of suspended consciousness and activity? or does it still continue to think and feel? and if the last be the truth, what do we know of its state, its engagements and enjoyments?

These are interesting questions; questions to which human reason can give no satisfactory reply. Even revelation goes

but a short way on such subjects to gratify curiosity; but it affords us certain, though very limited, information, well fitted to relieve our anxieties, to preserve us from dark distressing anticipations respecting ourselves in the prospect of dissolution, and from sorrowing without hope for those of our Christian friends of whom death has deprived us. “When the dust returns to the dust as it was, the spirit returns to God who gave it;” not, as some have dreamed, to be reabsorbed by the divine essence from which it originally emanated, but, continuing to preserve its separate being, to enter on a new form of existence, all the arrangements of which are regulated by Him “in whom all have their being,” and who, in every state of his creatures, and every region of his universe, “worketh all things according to the counsel of his own” most wise, and holy, and benignant “will.”

It has been supposed by not a few pro-

fessed Christians, that at death there is a suspension of rational as well as animal life. This opinion naturally rises out of the system which maintains that the human being is entirely material, and that thought and moral feeling are just qualities of matter organised in a particular way, and subjected to certain influences. This sentiment is not, however, confined to the materialist. It has been held, however inconsistently, by many who admit that human nature is indeed formed by the union of two entirely distinct substances, matter and mind, that, on the dissolution of the connection between these substances, while the body of the saint dissolves in the grave, his spirit sinks into a state of unconsciousness, from which it awakens only when, at the day of the resurrection, its material companion reorganised, presents it with the means of resuming, in greatly ameliorated circumstances, those modes of activity and enjoy-

ment which were interrupted by death; and it may be for developing other capacities of thought, and action, and enjoyment which the imperfection of the former material organisation kept concealed and unexerted.

These are not only baseless dreams, but clearly demonstrable errors. There appears to me few principles more satisfactorily established in scripture, than that death not only does not extinguish the principle which makes man a rational moral agent, a being capable of thought and feeling, but in no degree impairs its peculiar capacities; and I shall proceed briefly to state the evidence on this head, previously to inquiring more particularly into the nature and qualities of that state of separate conscious being on which the soul enters at death.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus* is plainly based on the principle, that immediately on death the wicked pass into

* Luke xvi. 19—31.

a state of conscious and severe suffering, and the righteous into a state of perfect security, deep repose, and tranquil enjoyment. Had that principle not been a true one, our Lord would certainly never have employed it for this purpose; for, if the doctrine of a state of conscious being between death and the resurrection, a doctrine generally held by the Jews, be an error, that parable could not fail to confirm them in it, just in the degree in which they acknowledged His authority.

There cannot be a reasonable doubt that it is to the same persons, whom he here calls "them who sleep," that the apostle refers in the twelfth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, (ver. 23,) where he calls them "the spirits of just men made perfect;" an appellation obviously descriptive of spirits not in a state of unconsciousness, but in a state superior to that in which they were when embodied on the earth.

In the book of the Apocalypse,* the Spirit, in language utterly inapplicable to a state of unconsciousness, proclaims, that “they who have died in the Lord are blessed; for they rest from their labours, and their works follow them;” *i. e.* they enjoy the rewards of their “works of faith and labours of love;” and the representation of the souls of the martyrs, crying: “How long, O Lord, how long!”† indicates that they are capable both of memory and of desire.

In the same mysterious book‡ we have the following description, which, from the connection, obviously refers neither to the state on earth nor to the state after the resurrection, but to the state between death and the resurrection:—“After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the

* Rev. xiv. 13. † Rev. vi. 9. ‡ Rev. vii. 9.

throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands ; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. . . . And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple ; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters ; and God shall wipe away all

tears from their eyes." Surely this is something more than the description of men delighted with the airy satisfactions of a pleasing dream. Those happy beings are not asleep; their powers of action and enjoyment are plainly in fuller, higher exercise than they ever were when on the earth.

The following declaration of the apostle Paul, in the epistle to the Romans,* fairly interpreted, seems clearly to assert that the state of the saint between death and the resurrection is one of conscious activity and happiness:—"If Christ be in you," if you be true Christians, united to Christ as dying and rising, "the body is dead," must die, "because of sin," the first sin of the first man, and the sin, too, that dwells in us; "but the spirit," the soul, as contrasted with the body, "is life," shall live, "because of righteousness," or of justification,

* Rom. viii. 10.

—shall live while the body is dead : “ And if the Spirit of Him that raised up Christ from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall ” not only preserve the spirit alive, but shall “ also quicken your mortal,” your dead, “ bodies by,” (or rather as it is in the margin) because of, “ his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

A still more remarkable passage is to be found in Paul’s second epistle to the Corinthians :* “ We know,” he says, “ that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens ;” *i. e.* we know that this earthly and frail dwelling of our souls, the body, shall be at death left by us, and shall crumble into ruins ; yet we believe that on the day of the resurrection we shall obtain for our spirits a better dwelling, in the immortal, powerful, glorious, spiritual body

* 2 Cor. v. 1—9.

which divine omnipotent benignity shall then present us with—a body like unto Christ's glorious body—a mansion in the heavens—the region of permanence, a mansion fit for the residence of perfected spirits, and from which they will never be called to go out. We know this; for we have heard of it in “the word of the truth of the gospel,” and our inmost desires go forth towards the accomplishment of “the exceeding great and precious promise.” “For in this”—on this account, because we know this—“we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that, being clothed, we shall not be found naked.” The evils to which we are exposed in our embodied state, in connection with this hope, excite in us earnest desires that even now “mortality were swallowed up in life,” as it will be “when the end cometh,” in the case of those who do not die, but

are changed. We would earnestly wish to reach heaven without tasting of death that is our natural desire: "For we who are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened." We in this body earnestly desire deliverance; for we feel the evils of our present state to be a heavy burden; but though we groan, the object of our desire is not death, but heaven; it is not to "be unclothed;" that, viewed by itself, is an object of our instinctive aversion; we shrink back from death, as death; poorly as we are clothed, we have no wish to be unclothed; our desire is to be "clothed upon" that mortality may be swallowed up of life." But this, we know, must not be; this mortal must, in the case of the great body of Christians, put on mortality, in order to its putting on immortality; and, knowing this, knowing that "while at home in the body, we must be absent from the Lord," under the effectual influence of

“Him who has given us the earnest of his Spirit,” we are “always confident;” *i. e.* bold and courageous, not shrinking from that which is so abhorrent to flesh and blood—death—the being unclothed; and are “willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord.” We would prefer getting to the Lord without dying—“not being unclothed, but clothed upon;” but since this, in the case of the great majority of Christ’s people, cannot be, we would far rather die than not get to the Lord; the great object of all true Christians being, that whether they come to the Lord by leaving their body behind—being absent from it—or whether the Lord comes to them present in the body—“whether present or absent”—whether they are to be among “those who are alive and remain,” or among “the dead in Christ” when he comes, their great object being, “that they may be ac-

cepted of Him." The whole of this very remarkable passage plainly goes on the principle, that though the state after the resurrection was the highest object of the apostle's hope, he yet looked forward to the state that immediately succeeds death—the state that is co-temporaneous with the state of absence from the body—with high satisfaction, as a state of holy enjoyment in the immediate presence of the Lord.

In the epistle to the Philippians, we find the apostle describing his own feelings, in a way which makes it very evident that he expected, on death, not to sink into a state of unconsciousness, but immediately to go to be with Christ: "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain;" or, to me, whether living or dying, Christ is gain. "But if I live in the flesh, *this* is the fruit of my labour," *i. e.*, "that Christ shall be glorified in me;" "yet what I shall choose

I wot not. For I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; *which is far better*: nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.”* Had the apostle contemplated death as to be followed by a long series of centuries of unconsciousness and inaction, though to terminate in a glorious resurrection, would he have been in any strait as to the question, whether to continue on earth a course of labours which, however fatiguing, was to him delightful, because conducive to the glory of his Lord, was not far better than in this case to depart—his body into the grave, there to resolve itself into its elements; his spirit to the house of silence, where, according to this hypothesis, the spirits of the just dream away the season of separation from the body? He was neither, from his natural constitution, nor his spiritual charac-

* Phil. i. 21.

ter, the man who could look forward with complacency to release from exertion in a good cause, however toilsome, at the price of the suspension of his faculties and affections for an indefinite period, and the being deprived for ever of all opportunities of serving his adorable Redeemer on the earth. "The man, indeed, is to be pitied—he is not only not such a Christian as Paul—he is not a Christian at all, to whom such a prospect has any charms."* To such a fate Paul might have been resigned, had he known that such was the will of his Lord; but farther than this he could not have gone. It was merely because he expected immediately to be with Christ, that in his estimation "to depart was" better—"far better." He not only expected to enter immediately on a state of conscious happiness, but that the happiness of that state would be so great as

* Mason.

abundantly to compensate for the happiness he had here in the service of Christ notwithstanding all the afflictions to which he was exposed, and which he necessarily parted with in dying.

Our Lord's declaration* seems plainly inconsistent with the idea of a long interval of insensibility, which seems just another word for death: "He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and he that liveth and believeth on me shall *never* die;" and the words of Stephen—"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,"† surely cannot mean—let me lose the capacity for many centuries of knowing, loving, and serving thee.

The only other proof of the doctrine we are supporting, that I shall refer to, is to be found in our Lord's words to the penitent thief on the cross. "Lord," said the condemned malefactor, "remember me

* John xi. 25, 26.

† Acts vii. 59.

when thou comest to thy kingdom.” “Verily, verily,” replied the Saviour, “I say unto you, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”† It requires a great deal of ingenuity, and a great lack of ingenuousness, to bring out of these words anything but one meaning—‘To-day, I shall be in paradise, and thou shalt be there with me.’ Who, unbiassed by system, could ever have supposed that they meant—I say to thee, to-day, that many ages hence, after the general resurrection, thou shalt be with me in paradise?

It surely ought then to be among “the things most firmly believed among us,” that the state of departed saints immediately succeeding death, is a state of conscious, active, holy, happy being. As our Shorter Catechism has it—“The souls of believers at their death immediately pass into glory.” They are no sooner “absent

* Luke xxiii. 42, 43.

from the body” than they are “present with the Lord.” There seems to be no interval between shutting the eyes of the body on the material world, and opening the eyes of the mind on the world of spirits.

“The parting sigh their fetters breaks;—
We scarce can say they’re gone,
Before the willing spirit takes
Its station near the throne.”

§ 3. *State of the souls of “the dead in Christ.”*

We are now prepared for inquiring into the nature of that happiness into which the deceased Christian immediately enters. Here, as in the preceding part of the discourse, we shall strictly confine ourselves to what revelation makes known to us. Our sole question will be, “What saith the scripture?” On such a point we must err, if we know not the scriptures—if we, in our speculations, either go against them, or beyond them. Conjecture on such a

subject—and there has been too much of it—is altogether misplaced. “When God does not speak on such topics, it is our wisdom to be silent. If the light of his truth does not go before us, we had better stand still.”* The whole of our information seems contained in these three scriptural descriptions, “asleep in Jesus,”—“absent from the body,”—“present with the Lord.”

1. *They sleep in Jesus.*

They are “asleep.” The figure not unnaturally suggests the idea, that to them the state of death is a state free of peril. It is a state which, in reference to the whole existence of the man, is analogous to what sound sleep is in reference to his existence in the present state. There is no more hazard in death to a Christian, than in a sound sleep to a healthy man. Rather it is like the salutary sleep, which

* Dr. Owen.

often terminates disease, and restores to health. It is the peaceful interval between the distempered state of the present evil world, and the absolutely perfect state which is to follow the resurrection. When a Christian dies, the words spoken by the disciples respecting Lazarus in reference to natural sleep, may be applied to the figurative sleep on which he has entered: "If he sleep, he shall do well." The state into which death introduces the unpardoned and impenitent is full of all that is dreadful. It is a state in which there is, with much present suffering, a "certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to devour the adversaries." But to the Christian all is security and safety. He can say, looking back, "O death, where is thy sting?" and looking forward, "O grave, where will be thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who giveth us the

victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Death in his case scarcely deserves the name.—“He is not dead, but sleepeth.”

The leading idea, however, intended to be suggested by the figurative view of death before us, seems plainly to be, complete rest from labour, and freedom from suffering. “The life of the saint,” as I have observed elsewhere, “is always in some degree, often in a high degree, a scene of toil and suffering, and the closing part of it is sometimes remarkably characterised by restlessness and agony. His passage over the sea of life is frequently stormy throughout, and sometimes becomes peculiarly tempestuous towards its termination. But at death, ‘God maketh the storm a calm, and the waves thereof are still.’ Then is the Christian mariner glad because he is quiet. His weather-beaten vessel is moored in a safe haven, never more to re-

* 1 Cor. xv. 55—57.

turn to the tossing of the wasteful ocean. 'There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest.' The Christian 'enters into peace—he rests in his bed—each one that walketh in his uprightness.' His 'end' is, emphatically, 'peace.'”

The figurative expression describes the state of departed Christians, as to both parts of their complex nature—their bodies and souls—now united—then disjoined—ultimately to be re-united.

Their bodies are destitute of sense, and incapable of labour. They sleep in the dust, free from pain and fatigue themselves, and incapable of being the means of affecting, with weariness or suffering, the spirit with which they were once so closely conjoined.

But we cannot doubt that when, as in the case before us, terms significant of repose and freedom from pain are employed

in scripture to describe the condition of departed saints, they are intended to bring before our minds the state of the separate spirit fully as much as that of the lifeless body, for it is the mind that is the man. We have seen that there is no sufficient ground for the idea, that the separate state is a state of unconscious insensibility. No doubt that is an idea which the term sleep naturally enough conveys, but the various accounts of the state of the departed dead must be understood in a manner consistent with each other. The truth is, no one set of figures can adequately describe the state of the pious departed; and therefore different, and what may appear incongruous metaphors, are used to represent its various phases. To convey the idea that it is a state of active exertion, the departed spirit is represented as "resting not day nor night;" and to convey the idea that it is a state of repose and freedom from pain, it is

represented as in a quiet slumber. In the one case, we must abstract all idea of fatigue from a state of constant exertion; in the other, all idea of insensibility from a state of complete freedom from weariness and pain.

. Freed from the evils of life—from the temptations of Satan—from the remains of sin—the departed saint is an entire stranger to fatigue and pain. He has desires; but no disquieting ones. His desires arise not from a painful sense of destitution, but entirely from the assurance of a still higher degree of holy happiness, to meet enlarged capacities for it. He has hope, but it is unmingled with fear. It is the full assured expectation of “the adoption, the redemption of the body,” and of the glories and joys of the final state—“the grace that is to be brought to him at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Such is the import of the expression, “them who are asleep.”

But our departed friends not only are “asleep,” but they are “asleep in Jesus.” All the holiness and happiness of Christians originate in their peculiar relation to Christ Jesus—they being, as it were, on their believing, identified with him as having died “the just in the room of the unjust;” and as having “risen again” from the dead in consequence of his having satisfactorily answered all the demands of the law on those in whose place he stood. That relation, as it is spiritual in its nature, so it is eternal in its duration. Over it death has no power. Death breaks many strong and tender ties, but it does not break, it does not in any degree weaken, the bond that binds the saved to the Saviour. Every blessing arising out of that relation is as secure to them dead, as it was to them when alive. They are among the dead, but they are the “dead in Christ.” “All the rights and privileges which belong to

believers by virtue of their union to him, remain to them after death, undiminished and unimpaired. They are as much comprehended in his covenant; summed up in him as their head, represented by him as their advocate, as they possibly could be when here on earth. They lived by faith, walked by faith, suffered in faith, drew near to God by faith in his blood. Whatever is meant by being in Christ is true of them now that they are dead, and shall be made good to them at his appearing.*

2. *They are "absent from the body."*

The state of the departed saint between death and the resurrection, is a state of "absence from the body," *i. e.* complete separation from the body. The separation of the body from the soul is not, in itself, desirable. It is the consequence of a derangement of that original state of

* Mason.

things which, when God contemplated it, after he had established it, appeared to his all-perfect, infinitely holy, wise, and benignant mind, "very good." "God made man immortal, and formed him an image of his own eternity." "Death entered by sin." It is a penal evil—an expression of the displeasure of God at the violation of the primitive constitution under which man was placed.

As absence from the body cannot for this reason, and other reasons rising out of this, be considered, in itself, a desirable thing, so, it is quite evident, from the fact that there is to be a resurrection, that a permanent state of separate existence, of absence from the body, is not that best fitted for developing all the susceptibilities of improvement in knowledge, holiness, and enjoyment, with which human nature is endowed. The best, the happiest state for a being like man, is the state in which a

perfect body is the mansion and instrument of a perfect soul. That is the state in which human nature exists in the person of the glorified Redeemer; and that is the state to which he has promised to raise all his followers.

For very wise and benignant reasons, God has implanted in the human heart a strong love of life, and an almost invincible horror of death—apart altogether from the consideration of the events consequent on the separation of soul and body. So strong a hold has the material world, with which our bodies connect our minds, through our imaginations and affections, that it forms, as it were, a part of our conscious being. We find it difficult, if not impossible, to form a distinct conception of our mode of existence in a separate state, without accompaniments, the ideas of which are borrowed from that in which we live. Death seems an unclothing us—a leaving

us naked. It is as if the laws of gravity were annulled with regard to us, and we, in a starless night, were compelled, not only to abandon our warm, lightsome dwellings, but even to leave the solid earth, and plunge headlong into the unexplored fathomless depths of the surrounding dark ether. It is nature that speaks in the apostle when he says—"Not that we would be unclothed"—oh, no—"we would be clothed upon." Our wish is, not that mortality should expel life, but that life should swallow up mortality.

Thus we feel with regard to ourselves—and thus, too, we are apt to feel with respect to our departed friends. Absence from the body is not that aspect of their present state on which our minds naturally dwell with complacency. And yet, when we look at the subject in all its bearings—when we consider this state as the appointed, and, therefore, the best way of

getting rid of all the evils which, in consequence of sin, are connected with the union of soul and body in the present state, and of preparing for their eternal reunion in the most favourable possible circumstances, we will learn to think of this absence from the body, from which we naturally shrink, as indeed constituting no inconsiderable part of the happiness of our brethren who have died in the Lord, and are asleep in Christ. The body, in the present state, while the man lives, is the seat of disease and the cause of suffering, and also the medium of temptation, and the occasion of sin;—and, when he dies, it becomes the prey of corruption. Surely to be absent from it, in all these points of view, is highly desirable!

(1.) *Absent from the body as the seat of disease.*

The body is liable to disorders of a great variety of kinds, some of which are pro-

ductive of the most exquisite sufferings. Every man in the body experiences, to a certain degree, these evils; and no man, while in the body, is secure from suffering them in the most aggravated form. It is most painful to witness a human being tossed with restlessness—exanimate with sickness—racked with agony; and, if painful to witness this, how much more painful to endure it! And it is not only bodily disorders and pain that are thus produced—the mind is affected. How often does disease cloud the imagination, weaken the memory—enfeeble and even derange the reason, and disturb and irritate the passions! How often does it render the man utterly helpless and useless, uncomfortable to himself, burdensome to others—equally unfit for relishing the comforts and discharging the duties of active life! It is beautifully, as well as truly, said by an Apocryphal writer—“The corruptible body

presseth down the soul, and the earthy tabernacle weigheth down the mind that museth upon many things.”*

In being absent from the body, departed Christians obtain an exemption from all these evils—“They hunger no more—they thirst no more.” They are in a region where there are no pestilential influences. “The sun does not smite them by day, nor the moon by night”—“The inhabitants of that land never say I am sick.” Weariness, languor, debility, sickness, and pain are all unknown there. They are secured from them, by being rendered incapable of them.

(2.) *Absent from the body as the instrument of temptation and the occasion of sin.*

But the body is not only the seat of disease and the cause of painful disorder; but it is, in the present state, the instrument of

* Wisd. ix. 15.

temptation, and the occasion of sin. It is by the body that we are connected with "this present evil world," which is employed by him who is called its "prince" and "god" in an infinite variety of ways to lead our minds and hearts away from God, and by its alarms or allurements, the hopes and fears which it excites, to involve us in sin, and in the misery which follows sin, like its shadow. The senses are the medium by which all external temptations to sin find their way to the heart. By them the gaiety and splendour of the world, with all that is alluring in the whole circle of the sensible creation, are presented to the imagination. Thus the appetites of the body, and the evil passions of the mind, such as vanity, pride, and envy, are excited and inflamed; and, "when lust has conceived," to use the apostle James' striking language, "it bringeth forth sin"—"the members" of the body becoming "instruments of unrighteous-

ness"—the hands carrying into effect the evil inclinations of the heart. Sin dwelling in us has great facilities for its unhallowed operations in this mortal body. The external world, consisting of "things that are seen," which operate through the senses, is a powerful auxiliary to "the evil heart of unbelief" in turning us away from the living God.

It is a sad thought to any man—"This day I *may* fall into fatal disease." It is a still sadder thought to a Christian man—"This day I *will* assuredly be tempted; it is but too probable that I *may* be tempted successfully, to sin. I am in constant hazard, and this body is the occasion of much of the hazard, of offending my Father in heaven—dishonouring my Saviour—grieving the good Spirit—injuring the cause I above all others wish to promote—destroying my own peace of mind—covering with shame the friends of Christ, and

filling with malignant satisfaction his enemies!’

How frequently does the Christian, while in this body, groan for deliverance from these evils! ‘Alas!’ is he daily—sometimes many times a-day—constrained to say, ‘How does this body check the aspirations of my soul to God!—how does it drag me down to earth and chain me fast to sense—how is my immortal spirit, my nobler part—how is even my renewed nature, wearied, oppressed, and borne down by appetites, affections, and passions which are “of the earth, earthy!” “Wretched man that I am.” Experience tells me sin is wedded to mortality. How willingly would I lay down this mortal body in the grave, to get rid of the body of sin and death—how gladly would I part with this body, since otherwise that body cannot be destroyed!’

Our departed friends, in being absent from the body, have obtained the object of

these groanings, which can be but imperfectly uttered. As their minds are no longer obstructed in their operations by bodily pains and disorders, so they are no longer solicited to sin by their connection through these bodies with sensible objects. The prison walls are broken down, and the captive spirit is at liberty. The house infected by spiritual leprosy has been allowed to fall into ruins, that its materials may pass through a process of thorough purification, so as to fit it for a permanent healthy residence for its former occupant, meanwhile removed to a region where disease is unknown.

(3.) *Absent from the body as the victim of corruption.*

But still farther, the body is not only the seat of disease and the occasion of sin—it is also the destined victim of corruption. The sentence is, “Dust thou art,

and unto dust thou must return." This mortal must put on mortality. This corruptible must put on corruption. "Flesh and blood," in their present state, "cannot inherit the kingdom of God." If the body, even when in progress towards this sad catastrophe, is, for the reasons just stated, no fit permanent residence for a redeemed human spirit—still more incongruous would it be for such a spirit to go with the body to the grave, and be a witness and a sharer there of the fearful process by which preparation is making for mortal putting on immortality, and corruption incorruptibility. Surely it is better—far better that it should be absent, entirely absent from the body—far away from the land of darkness, and death, and dishonour, in the regions of perfect purity, light, and glory.

When we thus look on all its relations, even at this least inviting aspect of the

state of departed saints' absence from the body, something not in itself desirable, something that we naturally shrink back from, we do not wonder that the apostle should be willing rather to exchange the present state of presence with the body, for that state of absence from it—that he should have come, even on this ground, after having been in a strait between two, to a full persuasion that it was better to depart than to remain in the flesh.

3. *They are present with the Lord.*

But, if even this aspect of the state of our departed Christian friends, when rightly viewed, seems desirable and happy; far more desirable—far more happy must that state appear to be, when we consider it—as a being “with the Lord.” Even to depart from such a body is good—better than to remain connected with it, liable to disease and pain, the occasion of sin, the

victim of death; yet it is far more what we depart *to*, than what we depart *from*, that makes departure so desirable. It is because it is a departure to be with Christ, that it is so far—so unspeakably far better for a Christian to die than continue to live.

The appellation, “the Lord,” in the expression “present with the Lord,” obviously refers to Christ, before whose judgment-seat we are all to stand.* When it is said of departed saints that “they are present with him,” it intimates that they are where he is, and that they are with him there—that they have intimate familiar intercourse with him there—and rising out of that fellowship as perfect, a conformity to him in mind, and will and enjoyment, as their natures in that state are capable of—and that they are not thus individually with him merely, but that being

* 2 Cor. v. 10.

with Him they are with one another, and are “together with Him.” These are all thoughts that are naturally enough implied in the very pregnant expression, “present with the Lord;” and their illustration, in addition to what has already been said, will bring out almost all we know about the state of departed saints, and convince us that it is such a state as should prevent us from sorrowing for them as if we had no hope.

(1.) *They are where the Lord is.*

The spirits of our departed friends are “with Christ,” *i. e.* they are where he is. It has often been said, and said truly, that heaven is a word descriptive of an internal state as well as an external place; and the phrases “to be with Christ”—“to be present with the Lord,” when viewed as equivalent to heaven, have been considered as referring rather to heaven as a state than

to heaven as a place. It has been supposed that, as by the soul's being absent from the body, we mean that it has no more connexion with it—does not act on it—is not acted on by it, and no longer uses it as a medium of converse with other spiritual beings, like itself, embodied in matter; so, by being present with God, is meant the exercise of all the faculties, both of intellect and affection, in reference to Him, after a more perfect manner than could be exercised while, being in the body, we are said to be absent from him; so that, so far as the phrase is concerned, we are not bound to conclude that, on death, there is any change of place, but merely that, certain obstacles being removed, a particular and greatly-improved state of thought and feeling take place. This idea has been illustrated by a figure borrowed from sacred history; "As Gideon's lamps, when the pitchers were broken

wherein they had been concealed, suddenly darted out their light to the astonishment of the Midianitish host; so the immortal spirit, when the vessel of clay wherein it has been held is dissolved, suddenly flames up, amid myriads of kindred spirits, to its own and their infinite admiration and joy.”*

Whatever there may be in this, it seems plain that the expressions, to be with Christ—and present with the Lord, especially when compared with our Lord’s own more explicit expression, “to be with me where I am,” naturally refer to the place where our Lord in his human nature is; and that the being with him there is necessarily connected with that frame of thought and affection of which the word heaven, when considered as expressive of a state, is descriptive. Where Christ is we are very clearly informed in the New

* Stennett.

Testament. "He was received," says the evangelist Mark, "up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."* When blessing his disciples, Luke tells us "he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven."† "The heaven," says Peter in his sermon, "has received him during the time of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets;"‡ and in his epistle he says, "He is gone into heaven, angels and principalities, and powers, being made subject to him."§

Where that local heaven is to which our Lord went when he left our world, we cannot tell. It is needless to inquire, for it is impossible to know; but we are surely warranted to say that it is the holiest and happiest region of the universe, bearing some proportion in its superiority to Eden,

* Mark xvi. 19. † Luke xxiv. 51. ‡ Acts iii. 21.

§ 1 Peter iii. 22.

to that which the "second man, the Lord from heaven," bears to the "first man, who was of the earth, earthy." That must be a place rich in all that can minister to the happiness of those who dwell in it, which the Eternal Father, the God of infinite power, and wisdom, and righteousness, and love, has prepared as a meet residence for his incarnate Only-begotten, in whom he is well pleased, after having finished the work which he had given him to do.

In this glorious place, the spirits of the departed just dwell. How widely extended that better country is, and how the mansions where the separate spirits reside differ from the mansions in which, when re-embodied, they are to dwell for ever, we cannot tell; but it is plain, that both residences are in heaven; and that both, when absent from the body, and again present with it after the resurrection, they are present with the Lord.

(2.) *They are near the Lord where he is.*

Residing in this blessed region, they are *near* HIM. While present with the body, they are where he is not; for though in reference to his essence as a divine person he fills all things, in reference to his glorified body he is not here. The Christian often, while here, exclaims, "O that I knew where I might find him!"—"He is not here; he is risen." Our friends who have fallen asleep have no need to express any such wish. It is already gratified. They have found him whom their souls love. He has fulfilled his promise to them, "Where I am, there shall my servant be also:" in the same country, the celestial Canaan; in the same city, the new Jerusalem; in the same house, the house of many mansions, the palace of the great King; their Father, because his Father; their God, because his God.

(3.) *They have free habitual intercourse with the Lord.*

But to be “present with the Lord” is, however, more than to be near him. It is to have access to him, to have free habitual intercourse with him, so that “out of his fulness they receive abundance of grace.” They not only dwell in Jerusalem, but they see the King’s face.

Communion with Christ is by no means a blessing peculiar to the spirits of the just made perfect. It is enjoyed by every true Christian in the present state. When under the enlightening and enlivening influence of the Holy Spirit, the saint distinctly apprehends the meaning and evidence of the revelation which Christ has made of his mind and will in his word; just in the measure of his faith does the mind and will of Christ become his mind and will. And thinking like Christ, feel-

ing like Christ, that happiness which, in the perfect man Christ Jesus, rises out of his perfect knowledge and love of what is true and holy, is according to the measure of his faith poured into the heart of the believer by the Holy Ghost given to him; and he finds that the words of the apostle are indeed, in reference to him, the words of truth and soberness: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." Even in this land of darkness, he thus finds himself closely connected with Christ. He has unity of sentiment and affection with him. "Christ dwells in his heart," and he is "rooted and grounded in Christ." Christ comes to him in the operation of his Holy Spirit, in the communication of heavenly and spiritual blessings; and he goes to Christ in the exercise of love, desire, hope, and holy affections. He thus even here converses with the invisible God, and has fellowship

with the unseen Saviour; and even this kind of intercourse produces a satisfaction of mind, a repose of heart, which all the enjoyments of the world cannot equal.

But the communion of Christians with the Saviour, while at home in the body, they are absent from him, is far inferior to the communion they will have with him when absent from the body, they shall be present with him. Not to dwell on the undoubted fact, that the glorified humanity of our Lord is locally near them—and, we cannot doubt, an object of delighted intuitive contemplation to them, as well as to the angels—it must not be forgotten that the intercourse of saints with the Saviour on earth, such as it is, is often interrupted. Then, however, it will be continuous and perpetual. The seasons of remarkable fellowship with Christ form but a small portion of the term of the mortal being of the most advanced Christian; but in heaven

“they shall be ever with the Lord,” and the Lord ever with them. Here the communion is imperfect. Their thoughts and feelings never completely harmonize with the mind and will of the Saviour. There is always something wanting—something wrong; but there, there will be perfect unison, for there will be no error—no sin. Here their intercourse is carried on entirely through the medium of ordinances; they see him only in his works, or his word, as by means of a mirror, darkly and indistinctly: there “they see him face to face.”

This communion obviously implies intimate and extensive knowledge of him; and this necessarily produces assimilation of character. Beholding his face in righteousness, they are “satisfied with his likeness.” They are “like him, seeing him as he is.” Beholding him no longer as by means of a mirror, but face to face, “they are changed into the same image, from

glory to glory." They enjoy also, so far as their capacities admit, a fellowship with him in his honours and felicities. This is expressed by their being represented as sitting with their Saviour on his throne, and entering into his joy.

(4.) *They are together thus with the Lord.*

This communion of mind, and will, and enjoyment, is not merely that of individuals, with the Saviour. The departed spirit joins the holy society of "the spirits of the just made perfect;" "sits down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God." We know they unite in common worship. This is plain from the remarkable passage in the seventh chapter of the Apocalypse, already quoted. How they communicate thoughts and feelings to each other—how they express their common views and affections to the one object of their supreme love and confidence, we can-

not tell; but that they do so, we cannot doubt. The social part of their nature is not destroyed, but purified and perfected; and, no doubt, fit provision is made for the production of all the holy benevolent satisfaction of which that principle makes glorified spirits capable.

On the question, whether Christian friends are to recognise each other in a future state, as on many others, which our curiosity, and perhaps some better principles, may lead us to propose, scripture gives no very distinct information.* The probabilities appear to me to be all on the one side, and they seem to me very strong. Nothing in human nature is to be destroyed but its depravity. Feelings, indeed, rising out of relations, which can have no place either in the separate or in the final state, must cease to exist, but all that will tend to holy enjoyment will con-

* See note.

tinue; and we must be essentially changed, we must become altogether different creatures from what we are, if the recognition of those whom we loved, not “in the flesh” merely, but “in the Lord,” and the renewing, in happier circumstances, our intercourse with them, were not to conduce to our happiness.

Such is a brief statement of the leading truths disclosed by revelation, respecting the state of the dead in Christ, during the period which elapses between death and the resurrection. It is not so extensive or so definite as we might have wished it. We see, on this subject, “through a glass darkly.” “It does not yet appear what we shall be.” As Richard Baxter says—

“Our knowledge of that state is small;
The eye of faith is dim;
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all,
And we shall be with him.”

§ 4. *Practical uses of these truths respecting the present state of "the dead in Christ."*

1. *To support under the afflictions of life.*

How well fitted are the truths which have come under our review now, to support the Christian amid the afflictions of life, of which he has often a large share! If the Christian "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of his hope," that death, which cannot be far off, will put an end to all his afflictions, by dismissing him from that body which is directly or indirectly the cause and occasion of so many of his sufferings, and introducing him into the immediate presence of the Lord, whom he supremely loves, where are "fulness of joy and rivers of pleasure for evermore"—his heaviest afflictions will be felt as comparatively light—his most protracted sufferings as comparatively short-lived. It is in con-

sequence of our walking so much by sight, and so little by faith—our looking so much at things that are seen and temporal, and so little at those which are unseen and eternal, that we are so apt to sink into despondency in the hour of trial. Were we habitually looking for those things which we have been attempting to describe—counting on them being ere long certainly ours, we should never be overwhelmed with any affliction we could meet with in this world. Though troubled on every side, we should not be distressed; though perplexed, we should not be in despair; though persecuted, we should not feel forsaken; though cast down, we should not be destroyed.

2. To prevent and remove the fear of death.

Equally fitted are these truths to prevent or remove those distressing fears which often haunt the mind even of the true

Christian in the prospect of death. Is it reasonable to be backward to part with such bodies as we now have, especially if we have the certain prospect of in due time obtaining far better bodies, bodies “fashioned like unto our Lord’s glorious body?” And is it not most unreasonable for those who profess that they never expect to be perfectly holy or perfectly happy, or any thing like it, till they are with the Lord, and who know that then they shall be perfect, and holy, and happy, like Him, seeing him as he is—is it not most unreasonable for them to regard with a slavish fear, approaching to horror, the event which, though often—by no means always—accompanied by severe suffering, will assuredly realize their fondest wishes and highest hopes; the only event that can, the event which certainly will, bring them into His immediate presence? As an old divine says: “We should esteem it our perfection when our

shells fall off; and it should be our concern that they cleave not so close to us as that we shall be put to much pain in having them severed from us."

3. *To moderate grief for the death of Christian friends.*

These truths are also well calculated to moderate the grief of Christians mourning for Christian friends. Absent from the body, they are for ever free from, for ever incapable of, bodily suffering; and, present with the Lord, they have fulness of joy. If we could, would we bring them back again? *

* "The languishing head is at rest,
Its thinking and aching are o'er;
The quiet, immoveable breast
Is heaved by affliction no more.

"The heart is no longer the seat
Of trouble and torturing pain;
It ceases to flutter and beat;
It never will flutter again.

4. *To excite serious thought in those who are destitute of Christian faith and hope.*

Let those who are strangers to the Christian's faith and hope seriously consider that

"The lids which so seldom could close,
By sorrow forbidden to sleep;
Now, sealed in their mortal repose,
Have for ever forgotten to weep.

"Our brethren the haven have gained,
They have reached the celestial shore,
Where all is assurance and peace,
And sorrow and sin are no more."

"Lo the prisoners are released,
Lightened of their fleshly load;
Where the weary are at rest,
They are gathered unto God.

"Lo! the pain of life is past,
And their warfare now is o'er;
Death and hell behind them cast,
Grief and suffering are no more.

"Join we, then, with one accord,
In the new and joyful song;
Absent from our loving Lord
We shall not continue long.

the time is rapidly approaching when they, too, must be "absent from the body"—when they, too, must be "present with the Lord;" but oh! in a sense how different from that in which the Christian is with Him! When their dust returns to the dust as it was, their spirit must return to Him who gave it; but not by him to be admitted into the holy delights of most intimate communion with Jesus Christ, along with the innumerable multitude of the spirits of the just made perfect, but to be by him doomed to those regions of misery where evil angels, and unpardoned, un-

"We shall quit the house of clay;
We their better lot shall share;
We shall see the realms of day;
Meet our happy brethren there.

"Let the world bewail their dead;
Sadly of their loss complain;
Brethren, friends, by Jesus freed,
Death to you—to us, is gain."

C. WESLEY.

sanctified human spirits are under “chains of darkness,” waiting for “the judgment of the great day.”

There, there is no place for repentance, no atoning sacrifice, no sanctifying Spirit there; and how soon, how suddenly may you be *there*! But here is an atoning sacrifice—here is a sanctifying Spirit; through that atonement, through that atonement alone, can your sins be forgiven; from that Spirit, from that Spirit alone, can you obtain that “holiness without which no man can see the Lord.” Be it known to you, that through the God-man, Christ Jesus, who died, the just one in the room of the unjust—who became a curse that sinners might be redeemed from the curse—who by dying destroyed death, and him that has the power of death; be it known to you, that through HIM are preached to you, and freely presented, for your acceptance through the faith of the

truth, a sealed pardon, good hope, a new nature, an unstinged death, a glorious resurrection, a happy eternity. Yes: "Eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

In the faith of the truth, then, gladly, gratefully receive what is thus freely given you of God. "Repent and believe the gospel." You know you are not prepared for death, for judgment, and eternity. But, prepared or unprepared, you must meet them—you must meet them soon. Prepare, then, sinners, O "prepare to meet your God," by acquainting yourselves with him, and being at peace with him. He is "in Christ reconciling the world to himself," "having made peace by the blood of his cross." Lay hold on *him* who is the power of God to salvation—lay hold on him as *your* Saviour, in the faith of the "faithful saying worthy of all acceptation"—and all is safe—all is

well; all is safe, all is well for ever. Continue to reject, continue to neglect him, and ere long you will find all is lost—all is lost for ever. “If thou art wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.”

PART II. OF THE FUTURE STATE OF
“THE DEAD IN CHRIST.”

We have already considered the present state of “the dead in Christ,”—our pious departed friends, both as to their bodies and their souls. We see with the eyes of our flesh the bodies of the saints, like those of other men, committed to the grave, and in spirit visiting as it were at intervals their low and lonely dwellings in the dust, we witness what might seem the wanton ravages of mortality on its helpless victims, in the

fearful process of complete execution of the divine sentence, in the dust returning to the dust as it was. With respect to their bodies, like those of the rest of their doomed race, "they die and waste away: they give up the ghost;" they expire—breathe out the breath of life which God breathed into their nostrils, and by which he made them living souls—"and where are they?" Ay, where are they? In a comparatively short period no trace of them can be found even in the grave. It has become empty without a resurrection. To the apprehension of men they are as if they never had been. We seek them, but they are not. We, by the light of revelation, follow their departed spirits into paradise, where, freed from all positive evil both physical and moral, they, in the immediate presence of the Lord, and in happy communion with the angels and each other, engage in employments suited to

their capacities and circumstances, and wait in tranquil, joyful expectation for “the manifestation of the sons of God—the adoption, even the redemption of the body,” and the increased glories and felicities of the final judgment and the subsequent eternity. And after witnessing, as it were, their high and holy enjoyments for ages, we hear the voice of the archangel sounding throughout the universe—“It is done;” and with the eye of that faith which is the substance of things not seen, that gives a palpable form to unseen things, a present existence to future events, we see the God-man descend through the opening heavens, with all his holy angels and the spirits of his redeemed from among men,—the dead hear his voice and live,—the happy souls take possession of their bodies, incorruptible, immortal, powerful, spiritual, and glorious, like unto their Lord’s glorious body,—the saints

alive on the earth are transformed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, not unclothed, but clothed upon, their mortal putting on immortality, and their corruptible incorruption ; and now the nations of the saved—the innumerable multitude of the redeemed—the dead alive—the living changed, and both immortal, are caught up together in clouds to meet their Lord in the air.

But this is not the end of these wonders. To the wonders of the resurrection succeed—and as we apprehend it, immediately—the solemnities of the judgment ; and these are, in their turn, followed without interval by the glories of eternity. To bring these wonders, solemnities, and glories before your minds, so far as scripture enables us to do so, is my object in this second part of this treatise.

§ 1. *State of "the dead in Christ" at the resurrection of the dead.*

Let us then consider, in the first place, what is to happen to "them who are asleep in Christ" at the resurrection of the dead.

1. *Evidence of the resurrection of the dead.*

No doctrine is more clearly revealed in Scripture than that of a general resurrection of the dead. Whatever opinion may be formed of those passages in the Old Testament writings which are usually quoted in support of this doctrine, the declarations of our Lord and his apostles are as explicit as human language could furnish. These are the words of our Lord Jesus:—"The hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of him who is at once the Son of God and the Son of man, and shall

come forth, they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation." And not less clearly did his apostles teach the people, and preach through Jesus, the resurrection of the dead. The following is a specimen of their teaching:—"There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust." "By man came death, by man also comes the resurrection of the dead; for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." "The last enemy, death, shall be destroyed." "The dead, small and great, shall stand before God. The sea shall give up the dead that are in it, and death and the grave and hell"—*i. e.* the separate state—"shall deliver up the dead that are in them, and death and hell shall be cast into the lake of fire." That is, there shall be no more death—no more graves—no more a place of separate souls;

that dissolution of body and spirit which death produced shall cease for ever—the disunited portions of human nature being brought into a state of eternal reunion. Such is the doctrine of the scripture respecting the general resurrection,—a doctrine so plainly revealed, that we may well wonder at the existence, and still more the re-appearance, of the strange doctrine of an invisible personal resurrection of every individual immediately or soon after death—so that with regard to those who have died the resurrection is past already.

2. *Remarks on “the first resurrection.”*

It is, however, to the resurrection of “the dead in Christ” that our attention at present is to be confined. It is the opinion of many good and some very learned men, that there will be a partial if not universal resurrection of the dead in Christ previously to his millennium, and thus long be-

fore the general judgment. This opinion is founded on a remarkable passage in the Apocalypse, chap. xx. 4, 5 :—"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them : and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands ; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection."

It would lead me into a digression much too extensive, were I even in the briefest possible manner to state the evidence in favour of the literal and the figurative interpretations of this passage. Without pronouncing dogmatically on a question which, like many other questions respecting

unfulfilled prophecy, is never likely to be completely freed of difficulty till fulfilment makes the meaning of enigmatic prediction manifest, my own conviction, after paying some attention to the subject, is, that the more probable meaning of the prediction is, that during the period styled a thousand years, there will be a glorious revival and extensive prevalence of the spirit and character of those who, during the former ages of struggle and persecution, had laid down their lives in the cause of Christian truth,—and that at the close of that period there shall be a reappearance of the spirit and character of the hostile opponents of Christ and his cause. Well may those be pronounced blessed who enjoy the advantages of that period—the most blissful to be known on earth,—and who thus have part in the first resurrection;—blessed compared both with those who lived before that period and those who shall live after it,

when Satan is again loosed from his prison. This mode of interpretation seems best to comport with the symbolical and figurative character of the prophetic book in which the oracle has its place, and best to harmonize with those passages of Scripture which seem to represent the resurrection of all men as simultaneous, and which lead us to view as closely connected the general resurrection and the general judgment. The bodies of the departed pious are to remain under the power of death, and their spirits are to continue absent from the body and present with the Lord, till the appointed period for terminating the present order of things shall arrive—till the end come—till the mystery of God be finished—till the Lord come from heaven, as he ascended to heaven, in power and in great glory.

3. *General statement of the doctrine of the resurrection of "the dead in Christ."*

When our Lord comes this second time for the completion of the salvation of his people, he will bring with him a glorious train of attendants. He will come with myriads of his holy ones, with ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of his holy angels, and with the innumerable company of the spirits of the just made perfect. "Them that have slept in Jesus God will bring with him." When they have descended along with the Lord with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, they shall be reunited to their bodies raised by the almighty power of their Lord, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself, and fashioned in the likeness of his glorious body.

4. Identity of the resurrection body.

The question as to whether it is the same body which the soul left at death that it is to receive again at the resurrection has been much agitated, and from the difficulties with which it is incumbered, the infidel has endeavoured to construct an argument against the reality, and indeed possibility, of the resurrection, and against the truth and divine origin of that book in which that doctrine is so plainly taught. Here, as in so many other cases, we have reason to regret the imperfection and ambiguity of human language. With equal truth, according to the idea we attach to the word *same*, we may deny and affirm the resurrection of the same body. If to be the same means to be formed of precisely the same particles of matter, then, to say the least of it, it is in the highest degree improbable,—we perhaps might safely have used stronger

language, and said it is demonstrably impossible, that the body restored at the resurrection, is the same body that was laid in the grave. The same particles of matter have since the commencement of time entered into the composition of many different human bodies. If to be the same is to be possessed of precisely the same qualities, then the resurrection body is not the same as that which was possessed on earth and parted with at death.—The former wants some of the most characteristic qualities of the latter, and the latter has qualities which the former never possessed.

But if by being the same body we mean, that there is a similar sameness between the resurrection body and the mortal body, as there is between the body of the same man in infancy and in old age—as there is between the dead seed cast into the earth and the living plant that grows from it, then we assert that the Christian doctrine of the

resurrection, is the doctrine of the resurrection of the same body.—The existence of such an identity can never be proved impossible, and the arrangement which provides for it obviously serves important purposes in the moral administration of God. Such an identity seems implied in the very name of a resurrection,—a term which signifies the restoration of life to what once before possessed it—not the creation of new matter to be quickened, or the giving life to formerly existing matter, which had never been connected with the soul which is henceforward to animate it; it is countenanced by those passages of Scripture which represent death as a sleep; it is taught in those texts which describe the bodies of men as rising from the precise spots where they were deposited at death, which declare that the grave and the sea are respectively to give up their dead; and it seems asserted in direct terms when it is

said, that "*this* mortal shall put on immortality—*this* corruptible shall put on incorruption—and that our vile bodies shall be so changed as to be fashioned like to our Lord's glorious body." To this extent the bodies restored to those who have died in Christ at the resurrection are the same bodies they possessed on earth.—But though the *same* in one point of view, they will be very different in others.

5. *Qualities of the resurrection body.*

All our information as to the nature and qualities of the resurrection body is derived from the following very striking passage in the 15th chapter of the First Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians, from the 35th to the 49th verse: "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die,"—or

rather except it have died—or be dead.—
“And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or some other grain. But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial; and the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There

is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was a living soul, the last Adam was a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first that is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, so are they also which are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also who are heavenly.—And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”*

Such are the leading truths revealed in Scripture concerning the change which is to take place on those who sleep at the period of the resurrection,—when their Lord comes to awake them out of sleep. These are things which we see but through a glass darkly,—we know but in part,—

* This passage is explained at large in “The Resurrection of Life.”

and being children, we speak, understand, and think as children,—but the time is coming when we shall become men,—put away childish things, and know even as we are known.

6. *Assimilation of the saints who never die to “the dead in the Lord” raised from death.*

When, through the power of their descended Lord, the saints who have died have thus been restored to an embodied state, in bodies incorruptible, glorious, powerful, and spiritual,—a similar change shall take place on such of the saints as are found alive on the earth at our Lord’s second coming. Such a change is necessary,—“for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither can corruption inherit incorruption.” Human bodies in their present state are unfit for heaven. All the saints shall not sleep,—that is, they shall not die,—a whole generation of them

shall be exempted from the operation of the law of mortality,—but all shall be changed. “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” this change shall take place. They, without being unclothed, shall be clothed upon,—mortal shall put on immortality, corruptible shall put on incorruption. —What a change! This moment weak, hungry, thirsty, it may be in many cases racked with pain, worn out with disease, just about to expire,—the next, invested with the health and beauty and strength and glory of immortality. And now mortality is swallowed up of life, and death in victory. The dead have lived,—the living have become immortal. Death is abolished. The last enemy is destroyed. Oh, the exceeding greatness of that power whereby our illustrious Deliverer shall subdue all things to himself!

And now they who have slept and they who have been changed—the whole united

host of the redeemed ones—proceed together to the judgment-seat to take their place on the right hand of the Judge, who, having restored to life also those who were dead, but not “in him,” releasing for a short season their spirits from the chains of darkness under which they have been kept to the judgment of this great day, and recalling their bodies from the dust of the earth, or the depths of ocean, has an assembled universe before him, to hear pronounced from his lips the righteous sentence, which shall proclaim their everlasting destinies.

§ 2. *State of “the dead in Christ” at the general judgment.*

Let us now proceed to consider what is to happen to those who have died in the Lord, but have now been raised by Him from the dead, in the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, when the sentences fixing the eternal states of men

and angels, and the grounds on which these sentences rest, shall be proclaimed before the assembled universe of intelligent beings.

1. *Evidence of a general judgment.*

The doctrine of a final universal judgment is revealed but in very general terms in the Old Testament scriptures. The following are a specimen of the statements referred to:—"The Lord shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment; and he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness;"—"God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." In the New Testament the statements respecting the final judgment are much more numerous, and enter much more into detail than those to be found in the Old Testament. We are informed that "God has appointed a day in

which he will judge the world by the Man whom he has ordained, of which he has given assurance to all men, in that he has raised him from the dead;" that "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ—for the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son—he will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, have sought for glory, honour, and immortality, he will render eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be awarded indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil,—but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good: for there is no respect of persons with God;" and that "all must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according

to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." We are informed that on that occasion "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven,"—that "he will descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God,"—that "he will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." "I saw," says John the Divine, "a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the

book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." These are striking descriptions, but they all come short in distinctness of statement and fullness of detail to the account which our Lord himself gives us of the transactions of the final judgment. "When the Son of man," says he, "shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a

stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also

answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

It is difficult to say how much there may be of figure in these descriptions. There may be more, there may be less, than is generally supposed. The day will declare it,—but it is sufficiently obvious that that period, termed the day of judgment, will be to those who have died in the Lord, a season of distinguished honour, and high, holy delight.

2. Happiness of the dead in Christ in the judgment.

(1.) They shall be gathered into one company.

They shall be all then "gathered together" into one company,—the whole of

the faithful, though having lived in countries and ages the most distant from each other,—while a separation, an entire separation, a visible separation, a final eternal separation, shall take place between them and men of opposite views and character. They shall be a perfect church “without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.” Not one there that they would wish absent;—not one absent whom they would wish there. They shall be the completed one flock, no longer a little one, of the great Shepherd.—The true church and the visible church shall be completely and for ever identified. The Apostle obviously considered this “gathering together” of the raised and transformed saints to “Christ,” as one of the events which make the appearing of Christ Jesus to his people so blessed, so blissful a hope.

(2.) *They are gathered together at the right hand of the Judge.*

And then they are represented as gathered together "*at the right Hand*" of their King. Whatever more may be included in this representation, it certainly intimates that they shall occupy, on that occasion, a place the most honourable and desirable in the estimation of all intelligent beings. They shall appear to be the distinctly marked-out favourites of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords,—those whom the Great King, whose name is the Lord of Hosts, delighteth to honour.

Nor is this *all*: they stand there as the sheep of the great Shepherd-king, given him by his Father, redeemed from destruction at the price of his own life, recalled from their wanderings by his Good Spirit, protected amid many dangers by his wise and powerful providence, guided by his

counsel, and individually brought to glory. Now there is one flock—one Shepherd; and now do they experimentally know the full import of his promise, “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.” He then shows them, and shows all the world, that he “remembers them with the favour which he bears to his own people,”—that they are emphatically **HIS**,—that he is about to make them up among his jewels, fashioning them unto himself “for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty,”—and that he is about to visit them with all the fulness of that salvation which is in him, with eternal glory.

(3.) *They are solemnly acquitted, and adjudged to eternal happiness.*

Nor is even this all. They are represented as solemnly acquitted from the tribunal of eternal righteousness, and adjudged

to the full possession of “the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” “The books are opened”—“the book of life;” that is, I apprehend, “the word of the truth of the gospel,”—“the gospel of our salvation.” That is the book according to which they shall be judged. *There* is written as the statute law of heaven—“Whosoever believeth in Christ Jesus,” whom God, for the great love wherewith he has loved men, has given *for* men—to men,—“shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” They are found to have been believers—believers whose faith worked by love—and to them is adjudged the inheritance of that kingdom which Christ, when he endured the sharpness of death, opened to all believers. To convince all that the bestowal of this kingdom, while a display of sovereign grace, is not the result of an arbitrary decision, but that the sentence which assigns heaven to them in preference

to others is founded on reasons which accord with the rectitude of the divine administration,—their labours of love, humbly estimated by themselves when performed, and now forgotten by them, will be shown to have been well remembered by Him, and shall be proclaimed to an assembled world, not as the meritorious ground of their acquittal, but as the satisfactory evidence that they were, according to the divinely appointed method, personally interested in that finished work of the Saviour which is the alone meritorious ground of their justification.

It has been made a question whether the sins of the saints shall be publicly made known at the period of final judgment. This much is certain, that there is no reference to this in the most minute account we have of the proceedings of that eventful day—that in the close of the 25th chapter of the gospel of Matthew, which we have

already quoted,—and that it does not seem to comport very well with the terms in which the truth regarding the forgiveness of their sins is described in scripture, when it is said, “that when their sins are sought for, they shall not be found,”—that they are “cast into the depths of the sea,” and are to be “remembered no more for ever.” It is, however, said in a passage already quoted, that “God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil;” and the disclosure of the sins of the saved may easily be conceived as calculated to serve some important ends, especially the manifestation of the sovereignty and riches of divine grace. This question is by no means one of vital moment. Every man is at liberty to form his own judgment as to the probabilities of the case; but no man is warranted to blame his brother because on such a subject he differs with

him in opinion. It is certain, however, whether particular sins are publicly announced or not, the saved will on that day be made to appear to be what they are—redeemed, pardoned, sanctified SINNERS;—men who have earned the “wages of sin,” but who are to receive eternal life as the gift of God;—men who deserve hell, yet are secured of heaven;—men whose garments were originally just as polluted as those of the rest of the race, but “who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” It will be as it were proclaimed in the ears of the assembled intelligences of God’s creation—‘These were guilty, depraved, condemned, miserable sinners, but “the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed them from all sin,” and He has saved to the uttermost them coming to God by him. They are washed, they are sanctified, they are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God,”

—and grace is to triumph in their salvation, through righteousness unto eternal life.’

(4.) *They are freed from all the false charges brought against them.*

And when fully acquitted and adjudged to eternal life on the ground of the finished work of Christ, their interest in which has been proved by “their work of faith and labour of love,” they shall at once and for ever be freed too from all the opprobrium which has been cast on them by ignorant and malignant men. The sentence of the last day shall wipe off all such reproaches. The world’s fools shall appear truly wise,—the objects their of contempt, the truly “excellent ones;” and the infamy with which it was attempted to brand them, shall prove the source of “shame and everlasting contempt” to their calumniators, world without end. Then

may be given forth the challenge and the defiance, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's chosen ones? Who is he that condemneth?" Then shall be fulfilled what is written in the prophets, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper: and every tongue that riseth up against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me,"—or rather, This is the chartered right which I have secured them, "saith the Lord."

§ 3. *State of "the dead in Christ" after the final judgment and throughout eternity.*

Let us now consider, in the last place, what shall happen to those who are asleep in Christ after the final judgment.

1. *They shall ascend to heaven.*

Having witnessed with holy reverence, entire approbation, and most deepfelt gra-

titude, the righteous judgment and fearful perdition of the enemies of God, the redeemed “shall go away into life eternal.” These words seem plainly to imply that they are to leave as a permanent place of abode, our earth, which has been the scene of their judgment as it was of their labours and trials. We know that “the heavens and the earth that now are, are reserved unto fire against the day of judgment.” We know that these heavens—our atmosphere—shall “pass away with a great noise, that the elements are to melt with fervent heat, and that the earth also and the works that are therein must be burnt up,” and that a new heaven and a new earth are to take their place, wherein righteousness is to dwell; but though it is a reasonable conjecture that glorified saints may be occasional visitants, if not permanent residents, on the new earth,—heaven, the heaven of heavens, where the Almighty has fixed his

throne, and built the magnificent palace for the accommodation of all his unfallen and restored intelligent children, seems ordinarily represented in scripture as the permanent abode of the redeemed from among men, with their Divine Redeemer at their head. The Lord is in heaven, and the gathered together saints are to be there "for ever with the Lord."

That there is a local heaven no intelligent sober-minded believer in revelation can doubt. Where it is, in what quarter of the universe it is situated, it is needless for us to inquire, for it is impossible for us to know. Inquiries into such subjects indicate a mind under the influence of a misdirected curiosity, rather than of an enlightened desire of knowledge. It has been as truly as beautifully remarked, "The acclamations and hallelujahs of the innumerable company of worshippers in the celestial sanctuary are not audible to our ears.

The splendour of the throne of God and the lustre of that city which has no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, are not discernible on 'that dim spot which men call earth;' no preternatural symbol blazes in the sky to point our view to the palace of the great King; and the word of God, the only source of authentic information on such a subject, does not supply any distinct testimony."* It is obviously a region of no narrow dimensions, for it shall have many inhabitants, and is no doubt every way suited for the permanent abode of perfectly holy and happy embodied as well as disembodied intelligent beings.

2. Their happiness in heaven.

It is more to our purpose to inquire what shall be the state of those who have died in the Lord after they have been finally and completely rescued from the

* Balmer.

power of death and the grave, and brought to dwell in the land of immortal life, and light, and beauty, and happiness.

(1.) *Freedom from all the imperfections of their former states.*

The first remark I wish to fix your attention on here is, that it shall be a state free from all that was imperfect in their preceding states. They shall be free from all the imperfections of their formerly embodied state. "The children of the resurrection" shall have no more disorders of body. To many the body here is as a rack to which the soul is bound,—to all it is a clog and a burden. The body we now have is not the body that shall be. That body shall be freed from all the defects of this body, and shall be endowed with glorious qualities which never did, never could, belong to it. It shall be strong, beautiful, active, glorious, incorruptible, incapable of

hunger or thirst, or weariness, or pain, or death. Some of the lower of our senses will cease to exist,—and it is probable new capabilities, fitting the soul to receive satisfactions of which at present we have no conception, may be conferred. The saints in the final state will be delivered also from all the uneasiness arising from self-dissatisfaction. Being entirely what God would have them,—while feeling their entire obligation to him for making them so, they shall be satisfied with themselves. They shall be entirely pleased with themselves, for they will know that they are entirely pleasing to God. Still further, they will have no painfully importunate or unsatisfied desires. No desire shall be known there but such as shall have its proper and adequate objects. There will be no unreasonable desire; and all reasonable desires shall be abundantly and immediately satisfied. There will be no disappointment—but a

perpetual uninterrupted flow of holy desires, pleasurable activity, and satisfying enjoyment. Neither will there be any more doubts and fears respecting their interest in the divine favour, or concerning the security and continuance of their happiness. This is a source of the greatest uneasiness to some good men while here below; but in heaven there shall be no room for doubt or fear, so that, as it has been happily said, they shall have as it were the joy of eternity contracted into each moment, because every moment they shall have a clear and undoubted persuasion that their joys are eternal and immoveable as the throne, as the being of God. In fine here, they can no more suffer from the unhappiness of others. That often forms a large portion of our sufferings here. But in the heavenly world there is no misery to call forth painful sympathy, and so wide is the gulf fixed between them and the world of misery—

that the misery of its self-ruined inhabitants can no more interrupt their happiness than it can the happiness of that God to whom, in happiness as well as in holiness, they are as perfectly conformed as their natures and capacities admit. "Who," to borrow the words of another, "can conceive the calm of those heavenly regions, where no tempest blows, and the voice of lamentation is never heard,—where no qualms of conscience are ever felt, and not a transient thought disturbs the serenity of the soul, where every reflection is delightful, and all without and all within is happiness!"

The celestial state shall not only be free from all the imperfections of the present embodied state, but also from all those of the disembodied state. In that state, as we have seen, there is no positive evil—nothing of the nature of suffering; but there is imperfection—there is something

wanting, though there is nothing wrong. There is the want of all the advantages which such a spiritual substance as the human soul, originally formed for union with matter, is fitted to derive from a suitable material vehicle. The soul that was unwilling to be unclothed, will be well-pleased to be re-clothed, especially knowing as it does that its new garments shall be suitable to its new dignity, as a priest unto God, like—but oh how superior to!—those of Aaron “for glory and for beauty.” In a sense in which they could not before, they will be able to contemplate “the human face divine” of Him who loved them, and listen to his voice, into whose lips “grace has been poured.” And will there not be, think you, additional enjoyment here? That voice is sweet—that countenance is lovely.

(2.) *As perfect knowledge of and conformity to God as their constantly enlarging capacities admit.*

The next remark I would make is, that the happiness of saints in the final state consists substantially in, as perfect knowledge of God, and as perfect conformity to God, as their capacities admit of,—and that this knowledge and resemblance constantly grow in proportion to their constantly enlarging capacities. Those “who sleep in Jesus,” when they awake “shall see God’s face in righteousness, and be satisfied with his likeness.”

We know that “when he appears”—is manifested, fully revealed, as he will be in the heavenly world—his people “shall be like him, seeing him as he is.” “It is life eternal to *know* the only true God;” and this eternal life shall be enjoyed in perfection in heaven. The true character of God as manifested in his word and works

shall be there *accurately* apprehended. There will be no mistake, no error with regard to any part of the divine character. They shall see God to be indeed absolutely perfect—infinite in power, in wisdom, in holiness and benignity. They shall perceive that every thing in the universe—every being, every event, is a divine manifestation. They will see him in every being and in every event; and every new discovery will deepen the impression of his marvellous grandeur, his terrible majesty, his unfathomable wisdom, his infinite amiableness, his inconceivable kindness.

Their perfect knowledge will not cost them painful toil and labour as our imperfect information does us, though it will afford delightful, inexhaustible exercise to their ever-expanding, ever-strengthening faculties; and while far more easy in the acquisition, it will be far more valuable in the possession. It shall at once be more

extensive and far more accurate. They shall not guess as we do, but know. They shall not timorously coast as we do along the shore, but fearlessly, with out-spread sail, launch forth into the boundless ocean of divine manifestation. Here, as has been said, we see but the fringes of the sciences, and the outside of the wisdom of God, in the subjects explained in them—but there its most hidden recesses will be disclosed to them. The whole intellectual universe shall be open before them, with all its inexhaustible stores; and it is, to say the least, highly probable, that in many instances they shall attain knowledge, not as we do by reasoning, but by intuition. This seems to be intimated in such declarations as that they shall “see no more as by means of a mirror, but face to face; they shall know no more in part—they shall know even as they are known.” And all this knowledge

will be knowledge of God;—He shall be the great central object to which all other objects direct the mind. Nor need they fear that even eternity will exhaust the objects of pleasurable knowledge. We can set no limits to the works of God, and God himself we know is “past all searching out.”

This enlarged knowledge of God will be accompanied by an increased conformity to God. The more they know of his greatness, and power, and wisdom, the more will they adore him; the more they know of his holiness and benignity, the more entire will be their dependence, the more ardent their love. They shall be “conformed into the same image.” His mind will be their mind, his will their will, —and in consequence of *this*, his happiness shall be their happiness. If the glimpses of the divine glory which saints obtain on earth, and their transforming effects on the

mind and heart which they produce, give origin to a happiness which enables them to look down with holy contempt on all earthly enjoyments, what rapture will fill the mind and the heart, when that unclouded manifestation of the divine excellence which is called "the face of God," is contemplated by them with unveiled face, and when the glorified man is conscious, throughout the whole and in the deepest recesses of his spiritual nature, of conformity—entire conformity, to the infinitely wise, holy, benignant, and blessed Jehovah.

(3.) *Corresponding acts of worship.*

This state of mind and heart will be expressed in appropriate acts of religious worship. Heaven is very often represented as a "temple," and its inhabitants as worshippers. Indeed, the whole course of their intellectual and affectionate being

will be what may well be considered as uninterrupted worship. God will be all in all. But the statements of scripture lead us to think it in a very high degree probable, that there are stated periods of solemn religious service, in which the perfected saints shall join together in expressing, in the language and in the music of heaven, their sense of the infinite greatness and excellence of Jehovah—their delight in his holy character and administration—and their gratitude “for the great love wherewith he has loved them,” and the “heavenly and spiritual blessings wherewith he has blessed them in Christ Jesus.” The scenes of celestial social worship in the Apocalypse, in which the bright seraphim in burning row are represented as blowing their loud uplifted angel trumpets, and the cherubic host in thousand quires touching their immortal golden-stringed harps, while the just spirits that wear vic-

torious palms, sing hymns, devout and holy psalms, with saintly shout and solemn jubilee, are among the most impressive pictures of that most wonderful book.

(4.) *Social enjoyments.*

And this leads me to remark farther, that in the heavenly state the perfected saints shall have enjoyments suited to the social part of their nature. The highest enjoyment of this kind will be their intimate and endearing intercourse with the God-man Jesus Christ. They will be with him where he is, and behold his glory. He will be present with them—more intimately present with them than we are with each other in the present state. “He will feed them, and lead them to fountains of living water.” And how will intercourse with him, “full of grace and truth,” at once enlarge and bless the minds of those who enjoy it! But they shall have inter-

course not only with him, but with the holy angels and with their redeemed brethren,—and how rich a source of satisfaction must this be! What interesting information will the inhabitants of heaven have to communicate to each other! What delight to listen to the prophets and the apostles, to Moses and to David, and to Isaiah—to Paul, and Peter, and John! “What treasures of memory, observation, experience, imagery, illustration, must exalt the intercourse of heaven! It has been finely said, ‘One angel’s history may be a volume of more various truth than all the records of our race.’ And then the intercourse of heaven will be a communion in which the noblest feelings flow fresh from the heart, in which pure beings give unreserved utterance to their noblest inspirations, to the wonder which perpetually springs up amidst the ever-unfolding and yet ever mysterious universe, to the rap-

tures of adoration and pious gratitude, and to the swellings of a sympathy that knows no bounds but the innocent and restored creation of God." Nor can we doubt that the sacred connexions of Christian friendship formed in the present state will survive both death and the resurrection, and become closer and closer, as they between whom they exist, draw nearer and nearer to the origin and substance of all truth and holiness and blessedness, and prove a source of exalted enjoyment to all eternity.

(5.) *All this eternal.*

Finally, we observe, this state of holy progressive happiness shall never terminate. The kingdom of our Lord into which his saints enter in consequence of his final sentence, "is an everlasting kingdom." "They shall be for *ever* with the Lord." It is true of them as well as of the object of their worship, though in a different sense,

that of their "years there is no end." "They shall reign with him for ever and ever." "There is no night there." "The sun shall not be their light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light to them, but the Lord God shall be their everlasting light, and their God their glory. Their sun shall no more go down, neither shall their moon withdraw itself; for the Lord God will be their everlasting light, and the days of their mourning shall be ended."

(6.) *Shall there be different degrees of happiness and glory among "the dead in Christ" in their final state?*

Before closing, it may be proper to touch on a question which has been agitated among theologians as to whether there shall be different degrees of glory and happiness enjoyed by different individuals in the final state of blessedness. Equally good and wise men have maintained the

opposite sides of this question. We are disposed to hold with those who maintain the affirmative. It seems plainly stated in Scripture. "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour;"—and according to the improvement of their talents, the servants are to receive the government of one city, or of five or of ten cities. If heavenly happiness consist in a great measure, as Mr. Fuller says, in being approved of God, and knowing that we are approved of God, there must be difference,—for all have not equally acted in the way which God approves—all have not equally been good and faithful servants. It would seem that they who have done and suffered most in the cause of God must be most highly approved of him whose judgment is according to truth, and must therefore in the nature of things have superior enjoyment.

It has been objected to the doctrine of different degrees of enjoyment in heaven,

that all there are loved with the same love, redeemed by the same blood, called by the same calling, and heirs of the same inheritance,—and that therefore they all must be possessed of the same measure of happiness.

• But, as has been justly remarked, this is an argument which proves too much. If it is a sound one, how is it that there is not a perfect equality among saints in this world?—for these statements are equally true of them here as there.

The truth on the subject seems to be this:—in proportion to the comparative holiness of saints here, will be their comparative happiness for ever. Every vessel, as it has been expressed, will be filled; but every vessel will not be of equal dimensions: and though there will be an unceasing progressive enlargement of all the vessels, yet their proportion to each other may remain the same throughout eternity. This, however, is not a subject to dogmatise

on. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." All the saints "shall stand in their lot in the end of the days;" and that lot, whether it be in every case the same or not, will be felt by each to be indeed a goodly one. Whether the final allotments of the saints shall be equal or unequal, they will all be satisfied, and will all "rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory."

§ 4. *Practical uses of the truths respecting the future state of "the dead in Christ."*

The truths which we have now been considering are replete with consolation and encouragement to Christians who are mourning the bereavement of Christian friends, or who are themselves struggling with the afflictions and trials of life, and looking forward, not without uneasy feelings occasionally, to their own rapidly approaching descent into the grave, and

entrance on the untried realities of the immutable eternal futurity.

1. *To comfort Christians bereaved of Christian friends.*

As there is no reason to mourn for our departed friends on the ground of their present condition, which is indeed better—far better, than their state on earth ever was, or ever could have become, so there is no ground to fear for them, in reference to their future condition. “Their path will be as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day.” The repose of paradise is good,—the joy of the resurrection day is better;—the final happiness of the heaven of heavens is best of all. The first is theirs—the other two are as certain as divine power and wisdom, faithfulness and kindness, can make them. “He has appointed them a set time, and he will remember them.” Let us not then, how-

ever much we may feel their loss, mourn for them. Let us rejoice that they are at rest, happier—inconceivably happier—not merely than we could wish, but than we can conceive,—all danger, all suffering past for ever,—nothing before them but triumph over mortality in the resurrection; the approbation of the Judge, and the congratulations of angels on the judgment day; and the vision of God, and the participation of his holiness and happiness and glory for ever and ever. “Thanks be to God who hath given them the victory.” Thanks be to God who will make them “more than conquerors through Him that loves them.”

2. *To encourage Christians amid the troubles of life and the prospect of death.*

And let those who have obtained like precious faith with them who are asleep in Christ, “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of their hope—the hope that is

laid up for them too in heaven, and of which they have heard in the word of the truth of the gospel." If we know that "truth as it is in Jesus," we have reason to trust that we shall be saved even as they. Trusting in him, we—guilty, depraved, weak, worthless as we are—shall have safety in death, confidence in the judgment, happiness for ever. Surely they who have such hope should not faint, either under the pressure of present or the prospect of future trials, but be "steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Surely they should purify themselves, even as he in whom they place their confidence is pure. Surely in growing faith and holiness they should seek growing evidence that they are *in* him in whom alone is safety, either in life, or death, or eternity. This one thing let us do:—let us seek to "win him, and be found in him." This is the "one thing needful."

Secure this, and you secure every thing;—lose this, and all is lost. Let Christians then hope to the end—hope perfectly; but let them at the same time remember, that it is only in continuing to believe the word and do the will of God, that they can inherit the promise. Following this course, they are as sure of obtaining it as if they already had it.

3. *To excite serious thought in the irreligious.*

But there is another class of men to whom the truths we have been illustrating speak another language—the language of solemn warning and of persuasive entreaty. In their present circumstances they have no personal interest in the blessings we have been speaking of. To them there is no safety in death, no confidence in the judgment, no happiness in eternity. No,—death will be to them the termination of all their enjoyments, the commencement of

unmixed, unending suffering. They must indeed awake out of the dust as well as the saints of God,—but it will be to “shame and everlasting contempt.” They must come forth out of their graves,—but it will be “to the resurrection of damnation.” They must appear before the tribunal of justice,—but it will be to be condemned in the judgment. They must live for ever,—but it must be to undergo for ever the miseries of the second death. There is nothing—nothing before them but a bottomless abyss of guilt and depravity and wretchedness, in which they must sink deeper, and deeper, and deeper, for ever.

And why should it be so? Why should they choose death rather than life? For if they who hear the gospel perish, it will be because they have chosen to perish. Eternal life,—which includes in it an unstinged death, a happy resurrection, a glorious eternity,—“eternal life is the gift of God

through Jesus Christ our Lord." It will—it must be theirs if they do not obstinately put it away from them. It can be theirs only by Jesus Christ becoming theirs, and they becoming Jesus Christ's. "He that hath the Son hath life, he that hath not the Son cannot see life,—the wrath of God abideth on him." If life, and death, and things present, and things to come, are to be theirs, they must be Christ's, as Christ is God's. And Christ can become theirs, and they can become his, in no other way than in the faith of the truth of the gospel. Let them come to him,—come to him in the faith of the truth. Let them receive him;—He is of God made to men, made to them, "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," if they will but receive him, and receiving him devote themselves to him. If they do the one, they will find that they cannot help doing the other; and then Christ being theirs,

and they being Christ's, all is safe, all is well for ever and ever. Because he lives, they—the whole of them—shall not *all* die. It is the body only that must die because of sin. When it dies the spirit becomes doubly alive because of righteousness, and what of them does die shall not die for ever.—Because he is the resurrection and the life, when he appears, they in their raised bodies shall appear with him in glory; and because he, having overcome, has sat down with his Father on his throne, they, having been made more than conquerors through him, shall sit down with him on his throne, and reign with him for ever and ever.

Oh that the eyes of the understanding of all my readers were but open to see the contrast! One or other of these statements which I have now made, is the very truth most sure with regard to every one of them. The curse and the blessing—eternal death—eternal life, are set before

them. If they remain in their present state of thoughtlessness, the curse must be theirs. It is theirs already, and it will develop itself in all its fearful consequences for ever. But in turning to the Lord by repentance towards God, a change of mind respecting God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—the belief of the truth as it is in him,—no number or aggravations of former offences, no degree of former and long-continued estrangement from God, and even of enmity against him, will prevent their obtaining a free pardon and a full salvation. God is ready to bestow these. Strange that the sinner should not be ready to receive them. Oh may God have mercy on all such, and give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth as it is in Jesus, and to the reception of the salvation that is in him, with eternal glory.—Amen and Amen.

NOTE.

ON MUTUAL RECOGNITION IN THE FUTURE STATE.

“I see no reason why those who *have been* dearest friends on earth, should not, when admitted to that happy state, continue to be so, with full knowledge and recollection of their former friendship. If a man is still to continue (as there is every reason to suppose) a social being, and *capable* of friendship, it seems contrary to all probability that he should cast off or forget his former friends, who are partakers with him of the like exaltation. *He* will indeed be greatly changed from what he was on earth, and unfitted perhaps for friendship with such a being as one of us is *now*; but his friend will have undergone (by supposition) a corresponding change.

And as we have seen those who have been loving playfellows in childhood, grow up, if they grow up with good, and with like dispositions, into still closer friendship in riper years, so also it is probable that when *this* our state of *childhood* shall be perfected, in the maturity

of a better world, the like attachment will continue between those companions who have trod together the Christian path to glory, and have "taken sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God as friends." A change to indifference towards those who have fixed their hearts on the same objects with ourselves during this earthly pilgrimage, and have given and received mutual aid during their course, is a change as little, I trust, to be expected, as it is to be desired. It certainly is not such a change as the Scriptures teach us to prepare for.

And a belief that, under such circumstances, our earthly attachments will remain, is as beneficial as it is reasonable. It is likely very greatly to influence our *choice* of friends; which surely is no small matter. A sincere Christian would not indeed be, at any rate, utterly careless whether those were sincere Christians also, with whom he connected himself: but his care is likely to be much greater, if he hopes, that, provided he shall have selected such as are treading the same path, and if he shall have studied to promote their eternal welfare, he shall meet again, never to part more, those to whom his heart is most engaged here below. The hope also of rejoining in a better state the

friend whom he sees advancing towards that state, is an additional spur to his own virtuous exertions. Everything which can make heaven appear more desirable, is a help towards his progress in Christian excellence; and as one of the greatest earthly enjoyments to the best and most exalted Christian, is to witness the happiness of a friend, so, one of the brightest of his hopes will be, that of exulting in the most perfect happiness of those most dear to him."

WHATELY.

"Christian friends, re-united in the realms above, shall meet one another with complete and lively consciousness of their reciprocal attachment upon earth; and with such recollections of the incidents of their mortal intercourse, as shall enhance the blessedness of eternity. This is the suggestion of reason: This is the testimony of Scripture.

How mercifully vouchsafed, and how wisely calculated, are these assurances from the Supreme Disposer of our lot, to console his true servants, when they behold a beloved companion, also his true servant, declining under the pressure of sickness, or deposited in the grave! The loss is no longer for eternity. The sus-

pension of intercourse is but for the remainder of the life of the survivor. The individual removed is the forerunner of those who remain. He has reached the end of the journey a little sooner than his fellow-travellers: and is awaiting them at the place of repose, towards which they are every moment advancing. Let the bereaved mourner persevere in his religious path, and the severed ties shall be rejoined. The restored connection shall be indissoluble.

Misapprehension, competition, coolness, vicissitude, doubt, fear, are no more.

The sun of affection shall no more be dimmed by earthly mists and exhalations. It shines for ever with increasing lustre, pure as the new heavens in which it is enthroned. United feelings, associated pursuits, conjoined admiration of the works of God, participated delight in his dispensations, blend the renewed attachments into continually augmented firmness.

The blessedness of one friend becomes the blessedness of the rest. The bliss of all is enlarging itself by reciprocity through never-ending ages."

GISBORNE.



REFLECTIONS
ON THE
DEATH OF A VERY DEAR CHRISTIAN FRIEND.

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REFLECTIONS
ON THE
DEATH OF A VERY DEAR CHRISTIAN FRIEND.

MY dearest —— is gone—gone for ever.
“I SHALL GO TO HER, BUT SHE SHALL
NOT RETURN TO ME.” A separation has
taken place between us. I cannot go to
her now. She shall never return to me.
I know not where that world is into which
she has passed, and “how can I know the
way?”

Yet I feel that we are not entirely separated; she is still the frequent subject of my thoughts, still the darling object of my affections; and though it is certain that

she has now other and more important subjects of thought, other and more deserving objects of affection, yet I have no reason to doubt but that she still thinks of me and loves me.

But still we are separated—"separated by more than land or sea." She is in the region of disembodied spirits. I dwell in the world of sensible and material things. Between these two regions of God's universe there is no ordinary sensible intercourse. I cannot doubt the possibility, and I am not inclined to deny the reality, of occasional sensible intercourse between departed spirits and living men; and it is a pleasing conjecture, no way inconsistent with revelation, that "the spirits of the just made perfect" may be sometimes employed in watching over the welfare, and contributing to the improvement, of those whom they loved, while yet in this state of imperfection, and temptation, and suffering.

But I have no reason to expect, I am so constituted as scarcely to wish for, such sensible intercourse with my dearest departed friend; and, as to an unseen guardianship, it is no more than a delightful dream, which may charm away for a little the feeling of loneliness and desolation, but can communicate nothing like permanent repose to the restless longings of the bereaved heart. I can no more resort to my —— for advice in perplexity, for consolation in sorrow. In a momentary forgetfulness of the event which has occurred, I sometimes seek her in her wonted haunts, but I soon become sensible of the sad truth—She is not here. I may seek her, but I cannot find her.

She is gone, and the friends who remain to me may soon follow her. Let me, then, not so connect my happiness with them, as that, when they go, it must go also. Let me place my chief happiness in intimate

connexion with Him who "will never leave me nor forsake me," to whom I can always go, and who can always come to me. Blessed be God, whoever dies, He lives; whoever goes, He stays. Who can separate me, if I am one of his children, from Him or his love? Shall poverty, reproach, disease, or bereavement? No, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord."

Though a separation has taken place, the events which mutually interested my friend and me previously to that separation, have not become matters of no moment. "God requireth the things which are past." Let me seriously reflect how far I have improved the opportunities which my relation to that friend who is now no more seen, gave

me, both of communicating and receiving spiritual advantage; let me impartially examine how far I came short in the performance of those duties which originated in a relation now dissolved for ever; and, while unimproved opportunities and neglected duties rise, as they do now, in long and dismaying succession to my view, let the tears of penitence mingle with those of sorrow, and let the very painful sensation of regret, that I can no more for ever do what I ought to have done, render me very careful in improving every opportunity of doing good and getting good which presents itself, and in performing every relative duty to which I am called with punctual fidelity. Let me also call to mind the many important blessings which along with, and through the medium of, my departed friend, I enjoyed; and let me not suffer the sense of deserved bereavement to

obliterate the grateful remembrance of unmerited kindness.

I SHALL GO TO HER.—Then I am not to continue always in the present state, for she is not here, and I must go to her. Oh how ready am I to forget that here I have “no continuing city” or place of abode, notwithstanding the frequent intimations of approaching removal! and how apt am I, notwithstanding all those disappointments and afflictions I have met with, still to say —“This is my rest!” Yet nothing is more certain, than that this is not my rest. She is gone, and I am going. That is all the difference. I do not indeed know when I shall go—it may be this night—it may not be for some considerable time; but assuredly, when at most “a few years are come, I too must go the way whence I shall not return.” No reluctance on my part, no exertions on the part of others, can pre-

vent this. I shall, I must go. And, if so, why should I "set my affections on things beneath?" Why should I "lay up treasures on earth?" While in the present state, I am necessarily engaged in its business; but how foolish is it in me to allow its cares to occupy that time and attention which ought to be devoted to the concerns of that permanent state into which I must soon enter! While here, it were absurd, as well as undutiful, not gratefully to receive, and moderately to enjoy, the bounties of a good Providence; but let me not seek, let me not find in them my portion. While in this vale of tears, I must lay my account with meeting with disappointments and sorrows. These I am allowed to feel as a man, and am required to sustain as a Christian. But why should I be deeply depressed by life's afflictions? Life will soon be at an end, and all mortal sorrows are extinguished in the grave.

Surely it becomes me, who know that I am to go hence, to maintain the temper, and cultivate the habits, of a pilgrim and a sojourner. Surely it becomes me habitually to “meditate on mortality and immortality.”

And, as I know not when I may be called on to take my long last journey, should I not always “be ready?” But what is necessary to make me ready to leave time, and enter into eternity? Nothing short of an interest in the atonement and spirit of Him “who by dying destroyed death, and him that has the power of death; who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the gospel.” And how is this to be obtained? “Eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief.”—

“God so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Let, then, “the life I live in the flesh, be by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me;” and then, go hence when I may, all will be well—well for ever; for he “died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we may live together with him.” Let me, then, “with loins girt and lamp burning,” wait the command to go hence.

But I must not only go hence, but I must go to HER. And where is she? The connexion between the constituent parts of her nature is dissolved. Her body is in the grave, and her spirit has winged its mysterious flight to the region of separate souls.

Her body is in the grave. Yes—that material frame to which, perhaps, I was inordinately attached, but which it surely

was not unnatural nor undutiful to love, as the mansion of so fair a spirit, and so closely connected with the person of the Son of God—that material form on which I have often gazed with rapture, and on which I once thought I could never look but with delight—I was constrained to bury out of my sight, and it is now a mass of putrefaction, or a heap of ashes. It will soon be dust, undistinguishable but by the eye of the Omniscient, from the dust that surrounds it. The eye which used to beam so benignantly on me has lost its mild lustre; the hand which was never weary in doing me acts of kindness is powerless in death; and the heart which used to beat strong and warm with every tender and worthy feeling, is now cold and motionless as the sod that covers it.

There lies all that was mortal of the friend of my heart, and there must I go to *her*. Yes, I, too, must say to corruption,

“Thou art my sister and brother.” “The grave is ready for me.”—“Dust I am, and unto dust I must return.” This animated frame must soon be lifeless. These active limbs must soon be motionless. I must make the grave my bed. This mortal must put on immortality; this corruptible must put on incorruption. Why, then, should I be so much occupied about that part of my nature which is soon to be so humbled? To pamper my body, shall I put to hazard the salvation of my soul? Let me never be proud of any of those bodily qualifications or accomplishments; that beauty, that strength, that activity, that are so soon to be the prey of the grave.

To go down to the grave, the abode of darkness and corruption, is a disheartening anticipation. It is dismal to think of going to meet even our friends there. But there is one consideration that goes far to remove these painful feelings. In going to the

grave, I not only go to the resting-place of my friends and fathers, but I go down to “see the place where the Lord lay.” Jesus visited the mansions of the dead, and sanctified them to all his faithful followers.

“The graves of all his saints he bless’d,
And soften’d every bed;
Where should the dying members rest
But with the dying Head.

But while my friend’s body moulders away in the lonely “house appointed for all living,” her better part has winged its way to the mysterious region of separate souls. About that region I am very much in the dark. Deriving all my knowledge and enjoyment through the medium of sensible objects, I feel a great difficulty in forming anything like distinct ideas of the existence and employments of disembodied spirits. “It is a land of darkness, as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death, where the light is as

darkness." This I know, for God has revealed it, that it is a state of conscious existence,—a state of deep suffering and fearful anticipation to the wicked—a state of high enjoyment and glorious hope to the righteous. I know that the wicked no sooner die, than they are in the place of torment. I know that the righteous are no sooner "absent from the body," than they "are present with the Lord." I know, moreover, that the leading character of that state is, that in all its grand features it is unalterable. As the tree falls, so it must lie for ever.

Into this mysterious state has my —— entered, and I must go to her there. Yes, when this dust returns to the dust as it was, my spirit, like hers, must return to him who gave it, and its doom, through eternity, be irrevocably determined. Oh! what manner of person ought I to be, while "walking on the brink of such an

eternity, and possessing no assurance but the next moment may convey me to the regions of perfect happiness, or of absolute despair!" Surely I should be "giving all diligence to make my calling and election sure, by adding to my faith virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godliness, and brotherly kindness, and charity,—that doing these things I may never fall, but that an entrance may be ministered to me abundantly, into the kingdom of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Had my departed friend been obviously an unconverted sinner, a stranger to the faith of the gospel, and the transforming influence of its spirit, I could have had no reason to doubt that she was gone to the regions of lost immortals, "where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth:" And were I, too, of this character, and continuing in unbelief and impeni-

tence, I certainly must go to the same place of torment.

What a dreadful idea, to enter on a state of intolerable, remediless misery, and to join them there, who, perhaps, have been brought there by our means! Who can describe, who can conceive the agonies of such lost immortals? Mutual tempters, common sinners on earth, now mutual accusers, and common sufferers for ever! To meet in hell must be a dreadful meeting indeed. O that the thoughtless and the profligate, who have witnessed, with but transient alarm, a succession of departures of the companions of their wickedness, would but allow their minds to rest on the horrors that await them when they shall go to them! Such an alarm might, by the blessing of God, induce them to flee from the wrath to come. Hast thou, O man, been instrumental in damning a fellow-immortal? O add not to his mis-

eries by becoming his companion in Tophet! The grace of the Redeemer can pardon even the crime of murdering the soul of a brother; and the only way you can now serve him whom you have hopelessly injured is by seeking the salvation of thine own soul.

But I bless God that my views in reference to my departed friend are not so gloomy. I dare not speak with absolute certainty on subjects so dark as the human state and character. I dare not pretend to forestall the decisions of the last tribunal, nor to declare the secrets of eternity. Yet I do entertain a humble and delightful hope that the spirit of my departed —— is with the blessed. I look back with much satisfaction to her blameless, useful, holy life, and her quiet and hopeful departure; to her humble reliance on the Saviour's atoning sacrifice, and her uniform submission to his law and appointments; and

though I cannot rend asunder the veil which covers at once the glories and horrors of eternity, I trust she is with Jesus in paradise.

Where paradise is I cannot tell, nor can I distinctly understand what are its employments and pleasures. But this I know, they who are in paradise are with Christ, and they who are with Christ must be happy. *There* "there is no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." In knowledge, in purity, and in happiness, the spirits of the departed just are far superior to the best and the happiest of mortals! "The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne feeds them and leads them by fountains of living waters, and God wipes away all tears from their eyes."

There I trust my dearest —— is, and there I hope to go to her. I know well I

do not deserve to go there. I am aware, that if I meet with my desert, I shall be doomed to depart into everlasting punishment, along with devils and damned spirits. But I have heard, and I trust believed, the testimony of God concerning his Son; and though the little influence my hope has on me in making me purify myself as God is pure, sometimes makes me fear that my hope is not the hope of the gospel, yet I will not, I dare not, give up my confidence. "I trust that, by the grace of God, I shall be saved even as others." And if I be indeed "a child of God through faith in Christ Jesus," I am sure I shall go where my departed Christian friend is. I know who has said, "It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it had not been so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you: and if I go away, I will come again,

and take you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. Faithful is he who hath said it, who also will do it."

Why, then, should I excessively mourn for the loss of even my best earthly friend? She is not lost, she is only gone before. I will by and by rejoice along with her in the house of our common Father, and the friendship here broken off will be renewed in happier circumstances, freed from all hazard of interruption for ever and ever. I do not know much as to the mode in which the blessed spirits in their separate state have intercourse with one another; but I have reason to think they have intercourse, and that this intercourse ministers to their happiness. I am not ignorant concerning them who are asleep, so that I will not sorrow as those who have no hope; I know that Jesus died and rose again, and I know also, that those who sleep in Jesus, God will bring with him; "For the

Lord shall descend from heaven, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then shall they also who remain be caught up together with him in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we be for ever with the Lord." I know these things, and I will comfort myself with these words—

"A few short years of evil past,
We reach the happy shore,
Where death-divided friends at last
Shall meet to part no more."

But when I go, as I trust I shall, to be with my departed Christian friends, I will go not only to them, but to all the faithful in Christ, who have finished their course, and kept the faith, and got the crown. I will "sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of my Father." I will be gathered to the "general assembly and church of the first-born, to the in-

numerable company of angels, and to the spirits of the just made perfect." And, what is better than all this, I will go to be with Christ; for "where his servants are, there is he also." They are in paradise, and with him in paradise. To be with Christ—this is the heaven of heaven—to see Him, and to be like Him.

And have I reason to hope that this blessedness shall be mine? Undoubtedly I have, if I am one of his people.—"Where I am, there shall my servants be also. Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Surely this hope should support under heavier trials than even the loss of my invaluable friend. This is a hope that should not only make me "patient in tribulation," but "joyful" in it.

And if I shall then go to my departed friends, and to my exalted Saviour, &

death, why should I be afraid of death? why should I be reluctant to die? Is it not desirable to be restored to the friends we have lost? Is it not infinitely to be wished for, to be brought into the immediate presence of the Saviour? To die, in the case of a saint, is to go home—to return from the land of strangers and enemies to the land of his better birth, to the house of his heavenly Father.

But how am I to be assured that in indulging these hopes, I am not in a delusion? There is but one way, and that is by “giving all diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; by being not slothful, but followers of those who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises.” O my God, increase my faith, animate my hope, and bring me in the way thine infinite wisdom seest best, home at last to my departed friends, to my unseen *Saviour*.

“SHE SHALL NOT RETURN TO ME.”
No, she must no more be seen among mortals. “The eye of him that hath seen her, shall see her no more. As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more, he shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more. There is hope of a tree if it be cut down, that it shall sprout again, the tender branch thereof shall not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground, yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up; so man lieth down and riseth not; till the heavens be no more they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.”

This is a melancholy reflection. From

intercourse with my friend, now no more, I derived much enjoyment. There was refreshment in her countenance, and music in her voice. But her advice can no more guide my perplexed thoughts, her smile can no longer clear away the clouds from my furrowed brow, nor her sympathising tears relieve me of half my sorrows. "One is not, and all seem to have departed."* "I am a solitary wanderer in the wild of life, a gloomy gazer on a world with which I have little connexion."†

But have I not erred in placing so much of my happiness in the enjoyment of the presence and society of a single being, and that being a mortal? Was I not warned to "cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?" If I made my nearest earthly relative, however worthy, my god, am I not justly

* Cecil.

† Johnson.

chastened for my folly and crime? And .
“ why should a living man complain, a man
for the punishment of his sins?”

And have I not erred also in connecting so closely my comfort and happiness with a creature, who, however excellent, was merely the channel through which the Father of mercies communicated to me a portion of his liberality? My —— was much to me; but she was to me just what God made her, and no more. He could have continued her with me, and bereaved me of all happiness in her; and now that he has taken her away, he can still “ make all grace to abound towards me.” He can open new channels of comfort, or he can lead me more directly to himself, the ever full, the overflowing source of all consolation and blessedness. Though, then, my —— cannot return to me, I will not refuse to be comforted. My best friend is ever near me, and it must be my own fault if I am

ever destitute of the most solid satisfaction. I may be—alas!—I am “straitened” in myself, but assuredly I am not in my God and Saviour.

And since my —— shall not return to me, let me not waste my time and wear out my spirits in fruitless regrets and unavailing complaints. It is the will of God that she should not return to me; and “his counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure.” He has so constituted me, as that the thought that my friend cannot return to me, must occasion painful feeling; and he will not be displeased if I give way to this natural impulse; “for he knows my frame, he remembers I am dust.” But he expects, and surely he has a right to do so, that while I mourn, I shall not murmur; that while I sorrow, I shall not complain. I submit to the appointment, that in this world I cannot go to my friend, nor my friend come to me;—I rejoice in the

appointment, that in a better world we shall meet, no more to part;—and I pray that, by the grace of God I may be enabled wisely to improve the separation, and diligently to prepare for the re-union.

But is there no consolation in the apparently mournful declaration—“She shall not return to me?” Questionless there is, if my affection be not pure selfishness. For where is she? I trust in the bosom of her Saviour and of her God, delivered completely and for ever from all positive evil, possessing much happiness, and looking forward with assured and joyful hope to perfect blessedness. And where am I? I am “present with the body, and therefore absent from the Lord.” I am “in the flesh,” the seat of disease, the occasion of sin. I am on earth, the scene of general rebellion against my God and King. I am in the world, the empire of Satan the enemy of God. I am surrounded with

temptation, I am involved in difficulties. I am struggling with inward corruption and outward adversaries. I am conflicting not merely "with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, with spiritual wickedness in high places." I am in "the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and of the shadow of death."

My dear departed friend was once here also. But she has gained the good land,—she has reached the better country,—she is for ever beyond the reach of temptation, and sin, and sorrow. And ought I,—though a wish could recall her,—ought I to wish her back again? My nature is so frail, that I would not desire to have this in my option, lest I should go wrong. The delight of intercourse with a departed friend, like every other blessing, doubly *valuable* in our estimation when we are

deprived of it, might seem to be so desirable, that I could not resist the impulse to recall it by a wish, if a wish could recall it.

“ But no,—what here we call our life, is such,
 So little to be loved, and thou so much,
 That I would ill requite thee to constrain
 The unbound spirit into bonds again.”

. Cowper.

I will rather endeavour to master the selfish part of my affection, and give God thanks for my friend, who has gotten the victory. I will not wish her joys diminished, that my sorrows may be abated. I will rejoice that she is safely housed from all the wintry blasts of this inhospitable region, though myself yet exposed to the peltings of its pitiless storms; and instead of indulging a selfish melancholy, I will, by the help of my God, follow her as she followed her Lord, “forgetting the things which are behind, and pressing forward to those which are before,” if by any means I may partake

with her the joys of paradise, and attain
with her to the resurrection of the just.

“If death my friend and me divide,
Thou dost not, Lord, my sorrow chide,
Or frown my tears to see;
Restrain'd from passionate excess,
Thou bid'st me mourn in calm distress
For her that rests in thee.

I feel a strong immortal hope,
Which bears my mournful spirit up
Beneath its mountain load;
Redeem'd from death, and grief, and pain,
I soon shall find my friend again
Within the arms of God.

Pass a few fleeting moments more,
And DEATH the blessing will restore,
Which DEATH hath snatch'd away.
For me thou wilt the summons send,
And give me back my parted friend
In heaven's eternal day.”

WORDS OF COMFORT.

Behold I die, but God shall be with you.—JACOB.

I die, but God will surely visit you.—JOSEPH.

I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.—God liveth, blessed be my Rock.—DAVID.

Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?—The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.—I know that my Redeemer liveth.—JOB.

Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.—Thy brother shall rise again.—I am the resurrection and the life.—I will not leave you comfortless.—I am the first and the last, and the living one: I was dead and am alive, and live for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death.—JESUS.

Our Lord Jesus hath abolished death.—The 'dead in Christ' are absent from the body, present with the Lord.—Them that sleep in Christ, God shall bring with him. They without us shall not be made perfect.—We shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we be for ever with the Lord.—PAUL.

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.—JOHN.

HE hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.—Faithful is he that calleth you, who will do it.—PAUL.

These words are true and faithful.—Comfort one another with these words.—Fear not; only believe.

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